

Rolling Stone

Issue 1250/1251
December 17-31, 2015



Star Wars Strikes Back

The Turning Point

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By Sean Wilentz

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"All the News That Fits"

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NUMBER-ONE SPOT

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ON THE COVER John Boyega (Finn), Harrison Ford (Han Solo), Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca), Daisy Ridley (Rey) and BB-8 (clockwise from top left) from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Photograph by **Jules Heath**/© 2015 Lucasfilm Ltd.

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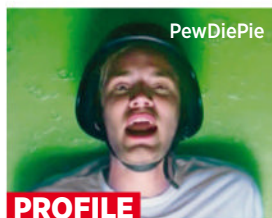
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MUSIC

THE BEST OF 2015

Our year-end coverage doesn't stop! Check out our expanded lists of 2015's top albums and singles – plus deep dives into the year's finest rap, country and metal releases, and much more.

Drake, Florence Welch, Keith Richards



PROFILE

YOUTUBE'S BIGGEST STAR

The loud, uncensored Swedish sensation known as PewDiePie has YouTube's most popular channel, with 40 million subscribers. We go in-depth with the outspoken gamer.



PREMIERE

IT'S A KILLERS CHRISTMAS

The video for the band's 10th annual holiday single, which benefits an AIDS charity, includes a cameo from Richard Dreyfuss. Check it out only at RollingStone.com.



POLITICS

FIGHTING STUDENT DEBT

Some business groups noticed that student loans were preventing young people from becoming entrepreneurs – and now they're doing something about it.

360 DEGREES OF COUNTRY!

Come to Rolling Stone Country for daily news, videos and reviews on Nashville and beyond. We talk to one of Luke Bryan's favorite new artists, Dustin Lynch, who opens up about what he's learned from sharing the stage with Bryan and why fans want to see him sing Beyoncé songs during his headlining tour. Powered by Ram. **ALL THIS AND MORE AT ROLLINGSTONE.COM/RAMREPORT**



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The Playlist

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1. Leon Bridges "So Long"

Can't get enough of Bridges' vintage-soul debut, *Coming Home*? Us either – but once you're done with that, check out this Sam Cooke-ish ballad he made for Will Smith's new movie. Lord have mercy!

4. Ra Ra Riot and Rostam Batmanglij "Water"

Vampire Weekend's Batmanglij lends some of the warm synth sheen and swoon-y melodies he does best to this tune with his old pals Ra Ra Riot, whose charming indie pop plays perfectly well with his trademark sound.



5. The Beach Boys "Tell Me Why"

Right before Brian Wilson made *Pet Sounds*, the band cut the goofy *Beach Boys' Party!* album. This acoustic Beatles cover is a highlight of the stripped-down new *Uncovered and Unplugged* edition of the '65 LP.

2. Trust Fund "4th August"

Sweet, sad, pretty guitar pop from an up-and-coming British act that's learned all the right tricks from all your favorite Clinton-era college-rock bands.

3. Pusha T "Untouchable"

One of the coldest rappers in the game samples Biggie, disses Donald Trump and compares himself to U2 ("I am like Bono with the Edge") – and that's just in the first 30 seconds of this Timbaland-produced cut. We can't wait for his upcoming *King Push* LP.



6. Cage the Elephant "Trouble"

These Kentucky psychedelic rockers know how to get loud, but on their latest single they go spooky-quiet instead. Feels like sleepwalking through a haunted house.



7. Savages "T.I.W.Y.G."

"This is what you get when you mess with love," lead singer Jehnny Beth warns over pummeling bass – but the U.K. post-punk crew's new song is so fun, you'll want to mess with it anyway, consequences be damned.

MY LIST



Gary Clark Jr.

Five Songs I Wish I'd Written

The guitarist, who's about to kick off a U.S. tour, told us about five songs that inspire him.

B.B. King

"You're Still My Woman"
On *Live in Japan*, there's a place where the band breaks down, and he goes into this run that is so jazzy, funky, raw – and then the band comes back in perfectly. It's inspiring as a guitar player.

Alabama Shakes "Gemini"

I love the way Brittany Howard sings this song. The band is in the pocket, and for her to be that vulnerable in the groove, and so expressive with her vocals, really moves me.

2Pac

"Hold Ya Head"

This song goes in the same category as "What's Going On," or Bob Marley's "So Much Trouble in the World" – it's uplifting with a hint of darkness.

Big K.R.I.T. "Cadillactica"

K.R.I.T. reminds me of a modern-day blues artist. He's got this Southern Delta vibe in his beats and the way he flows.

Prince

"I Would Die 4 U"

I've always wanted to sing this song for a woman. The groove is undeniable. As soon as it comes on, everyone wants to dance.

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Correspondence

Love Letters & Advice



Adele Returns

I LEARNED MORE ABOUT Adele in this excellent profile by Brian Hiatt ["She's the One," RS 1248] than I ever knew. It put all the stories in the British tabloids into context. I continue to be impressed by how she acknowledges her influences: the Spice Girls, Madonna, Frank Ocean. How refreshing.

Mark Butler, via the Internet

I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS POSSIBLE to love Adele even more, but it's happened. A well-written story about how genuine and beautiful she really is. She deserves every bit of success.

Michelle Cleary, Omaha, NE

I LOVE THAT ADELE WON'T play the game where women are pitted against each other. And I love that she seems genuinely happy to be back.

Karla Bates, Tabasco, Mexico

I'M CURIOUS WHY ADELE REGRETS working with Damon Albarn after he said she was "insecure," but took Rick Rubin's criticism ("I don't believe you") after he listened to the demos for 25.

Jim Shearer, New York

YOUR COVER PHOTO OF Adele is so moving and powerful, I want to frame it. I choke up just looking at it, like when ever I hear a favorite song.

Pat Duffy, St. Paul, MN

The Last Blues Man

In RS 1248, associate editor Patrick Doyle profiled guitar great Buddy Guy ["King Bee"], who Keith Richards calls "the top honcho" and "the godfather" of the blues. ROLLING STONE readers and Guy fans responded.

I WAS EXTREMELY EXCITED to read about Buddy Guy – a poignant article about a blues giant and a gentleman. Thanks to Patrick Doyle for a job well done.

Mike Norcutt, Pittsburgh

THIS KIND OF EXTENDED biographical piece on groundbreaking pioneers in American and British music is what ROLLING STONE excels at – and why I've been a subscriber from Issue One.

*Chick DeCicco
Hammon, NJ*

THE BLUES IS AMERICA'S unique gift. Buddy is music royalty and as important to all blues lovers as Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald. Long may he reign.

*Steven Griffin
Greystones, Ireland*

SO MANY QUOTABLE MOMENTS in this piece. Buddy

talking about black musicians feeling resentful of white bands getting rich off the blues: "My answer to that is, if you swim 10 lengths of a pool and I swim two, you're doing something I ain't."

Bob Jackson, via the Internet



I'M A 23-YEAR-OLD GUITARIST who thinks Buddy Guy is everything. Whether you listened to Buddy or to one of the British Invasion guitarists, we're all influenced by him in some way. I was lucky to catch him at a gig in Dallas – I'll take that memory to the grave.

Olan Mijana, Dallas

O'Malley's Race

STEPHEN RODRICK WROTE A compelling piece on Maryland dark horse Martin O'Malley ["O'Malley's Long Shot," RS 1248]. The guy's got experience and a restless intelligence. Not sure he's temperamentally suited for the presidency, but he certainly could be somebody's VP.

*Margaret Gregory
Via the Internet*

O'MALLEY IS THE NUMBER-one reason Baltimore has become a cesspool. A statewide rebuke was handed to him on

his way out the door as Maryland, overwhelmingly Democratic, elected a Republican in a landslide.

Sherm Stephens, Baltimore

GOOD TO SEE A STORY ABOUT someone who's not a "top-tier" candidate. Everyone should do research on all the candidates before voting. It could change the future of our country.

Andy Arnold, Ooltewah, TN

Against All Odds

HOW GREAT THAT PHIL COLLINS is making a comeback – there are thousands of peo-

ple who are thrilled with this news ["Phil Collins' Unlikely Return," RS 1248]. Enjoy your solo-career revival, Phil, and we'll pray for a re-formation of Genesis and some new material.

*Sean Hegarty
Brisbane, Australia*

GENESIS IS MY FAVORITE band of all time, but please, no reunions – especially if Phil still can't play drums. I'm not so sure Peter Gabriel wants to dress up as Slipperman again, and they'd probably just forget to ask Steve Hackett.

*Brent Bollmeier
Marissa, IL*

Grimes Does It

LOVED THE DETAIL IN THE Grimes story ["One-Woman Supernova," RS 1248]. As Rachel Syme writes, Claire Boucher calls herself an auteur "without sarcasm." Great art is DIY.

*Ginny Thorp
Via the Internet*

ZZ's Top Tracks

BILLY GIBBONS MADE GOOD choices ["My Life in 15 Songs," RS 1248], especially his "99th Floor" shout-out to the 13th Floor Elevators. Billy's pal Roky Erickson has to be smiling.

Rich Foley, Fayette, OH

Waters' Way

NICE, REVEALING Q&A WITH Roger Waters [RS 1248] that kind of reminds us that great songwriters are not always philosopher kings.

Marty Simon, Toronto

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Rock & Roll



AT THE BATACLAN
Dave Catching,
Jesse Hughes
and Julian Doro
(from left) minutes
before the attack

After the Nightmare

AMONG THE FIRST TO HEAR were fellow musicians: On November 13th, Dan Auerbach and his new band the Arcs had just started playing a show at the Trianon theater in Paris when they heard sirens outside, followed by the alarming news from the Bataclan theater, less than two miles away. "People started telling us there was a shooting," says Auerbach. "Then I heard there was a bombing at the Eagles of Death Metal concert. I said, 'What,

An Eagles of Death Metal show turned into one of rock's darkest nights ever. What's next for the band – and live music?

BY DAVID BROWNE

are you kidding?'" That night, part-time Paris resident Lenny Kravitz got word from a bandmate that Helen Jane Wilson, the owner of a local catering business who had worked with Kravitz and Eagles of Death Metal, was inside the Bataclan and had been wounded. "It was horrible," says Kravitz.

Soon, the rest of the world learned exactly what had occurred: ISIS-affiliated terrorists had stormed into the Bataclan, the legendary 1,500-capacity concert

hall, spraying gunfire around the club and killing 89 people – the deadliest attack in a night of coordinated terrorism that would claim 130 lives in total, as of press time. Overnight, a band devoted to lighthearted rock & roll, and a storied Paris venue that had played host to artists from Edith Piaf to Jeff Buckley to Prince, were at the center of one of the darkest nights in music history. In an interview with *Vice*, the traumatized band described a narrow escape and scenes of terror. “It went on for 10, 15 minutes,” said bassist Matt McJunkins. “Then it would stop. There was a sense of relief. Then it would start up again.”

Most of the victims were simply fans who had come out for a fun Friday night – people like Maxime Bouffard, a 26-year-old indie filmmaker, and 23-year-old design student Elodie Breuil – and some were music-world professionals. Nick Alexander, 36, who handled the band’s merchandise – and had previously toured with the Black Keys and Panic! At the Disco – was among the first known to be killed. “Touring seemed to make him happiest, more than anybody,” says Black Keys drummer Patrick Carney. Another victim was Parisian music journalist (and a former contributor to *ROLLING STONE*’s French edition) Guillaume B. Decherf, a 43-year-old father of two who had just raved about Eagles of Death Metal’s latest album in a local rock magazine.

Three employees of the group’s European label, Universal – project manager Thomas Ayad, marketing executive Manu Perez and marketing manager Marie Mosser – were also killed. Ayad had personally championed the Eagles, helping them secure their European deal. He had finally met lead singer Jesse Hughes earlier that year in Paris. “He was a big fan,” says Universal exec Quentin Pestre. Speaking to a radio interviewer the next day, Bono of U2 – who postponed a Paris show in the aftermath – would say of the victims, “These are our people.”

Eagles of Death Metal canceled the rest of their European dates, and in their own words are “still trying to come to terms” with the horror of that night in Paris. The band is often seen as an offshoot of hard-



THE AFTERMATH

The impromptu memorial at the Bataclan (top), three days after the attack that killed 89 people. Above: Bono, the Edge, Larry Mullen Jr. and Adam Clayton of U2, who canceled their Paris show, at a vigil.

rockers Queens of the Stone Age – it was formed by Queens frontman Josh Homme and his childhood friend Hughes in 1998. The Eagles just released *Zipper Down*, their first album in seven years.

Homme, who plays drums with the group, sat out this European trip because of the imminent arrival of his third child with wife Brody Dalle. Keys drummer Carney had been asked to fill in for him on these dates, but he declined. “It was a six-week tour in Europe,” Carney says. “If it was shorter, I would have agreed to do it.” Carney’s recommendation, Julian Dorio – best known for playing with

Athens, Georgia, indie rockers the Whigs – was behind the kit when the band hit the stage in Paris, about halfway through the tour.

Early in the Eagles’ set at the Bataclan, a clearly pumped-up Hughes addressed the crowd. “When I look around, only two words come to mind: *nos amis* [our friends],” he said. According to audience member Stéphane Toutlouyan, “The band was playing really well, and Jesse had silly banter between songs.” The band had just launched into “Kiss the Devil” when masked men with AK-47s entered through the front door of the theater and began shooting. The group – Hughes, Dorio, McJunkins and guitarists Dave Catching and Eden Galindo – fled the stage and managed to escape the club. “I saw two guys out front...just relentlessly shooting into the audience,” said Dorio. “And that might be just the most awful thing ever.”

The effects of the attack were felt immediately in the concert world. In the days after, metal detectors were set up at a Bob Dylan show in Bologna, Italy, and an armed guard was stationed outside Dylan’s dressing room. Prince and the Foo Fighters canceled European tours. Lamb of God canceled their European shows, with singer Randy Blythe writing, “I can deal with people disagreeing with me and my actions....I could not deal with a news story that reads, ‘Hundreds die at Lamb of God concert. Authorities say potential warning signs were ignored by band.’” And concert vets expect deep scrutiny of security protocols at shows. “In many buildings, they have metal detectors and bomb

dogs, but there will be more searches for sure,” says promoter Ron Delsener. “I can see big acts not playing a place unless you put in special equipment. That’s the world we live in, and it’s only getting worse.”

But Hughes has pledged to continue playing music. “I may be scared, and maybe I went through some bad shit – but I’m breathing,” he said. “I want to be the first band to play in the Bataclan when it opens back up.”

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY Jonathan K. Dick, Patrick Doyle, Romain Flon and Kory Grow

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December 11 |

IN THE STUDIO

Sia Does It Herself

Adele, Beyoncé and Rihanna passed on songs she wrote for them, so she made them her own

EARLIER THIS YEAR, SIA FURLER WAS in the studio with Adele, helping write songs for what would become *25*. There was a problem, in Furler's mind at least: She worried she was being too pushy with her song ideas. "When I work with artists, I try to check my ego at the door and become their *bitch*," says Furler, 39. "I e-mailed Adele, saying, 'I'm worried it was annoying working with me.' She wrote me back, like, 'What are you talking about?'"

Adele may have brushed off any problems in the studio, but she didn't include the songs she wrote with Furler on *25*. "Maybe the songs had too much my voice and not enough hers," Furler says. Instead, the two tracks from the session—including the thrilling empowerment anthem "Alive"—wound up on Furler's new album, *This Is Acting* (due January 29th). The record has a novel concept: It's full of songs rejected by A-list artists.

“I feel like these songs are hits, but nobody wanted them. Let's see if I'm right.”

"I feel like they're hits, but nobody wanted them," she says. "So I thought, 'Let's see, as an experiment, if I'm right.'" The reggae-tinged "Cheap Thrills" was, in Furler's words, too "cutesy" for Rihanna. "Footprints" was left from a Beyoncé session. "And you'll know one was a Shakira reject," she says, "because I sound like Shakira!"

Furler, who had her biggest hit as an artist with 2014's *1000 Forms of Fear*, says her secret is speed: "I'm pretty successful because I'm productive," she says, "not necessarily because I'm a great songwriter." She wrote 25 songs for Beyoncé in a session in the Hamptons a few years ago, but only one, "Pretty Hurts," made Beyoncé's self-titled 2013 LP.

Writing for others means Furler doesn't always have a personal connection to a song—take the dark but bubbly "Reaper," which she originally co-wrote with Kanye West for Rihanna. "I don't care about the song," she says. "It's a good, fun song, but I didn't anticipate it being on the record."

There is one track she didn't offer to anyone else: "One Million Bullets," a lush, hypnotic torch song she calls her "baby." As Furler gets as big as the artists she writes for, she may do that more often. "As my value increases, it makes more sense for me to sing those songs as opposed to giving them away. Which is exciting!"

BRITTANY SPANOS



Sia onstage in November

STUDIO NOTES



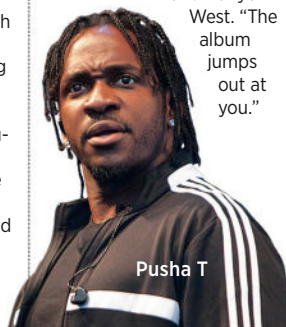
Beth

SAVAGES' LOVE AND FURY

When Savages began work on their second LP, the U.K. post-punks took on a new challenge: love songs, which singer Jehnny Beth was inspired to write after being showered with good vibes from crowds around the world. *Adore Life*, due January 22nd, is just as visceral as Savages' debut. "If there were beautiful lyrics, we wanted it to be contradicted by something nasty or aggressive," bassist Ayse Hassan says.

PUSHA T'S HEART OF DARKNESS

For *Darkest Before Dawn* (out December 18th), Pusha T seems to have one goal: to create the most menacing-sounding rap record in the game. "I got from each of them the darkest part of their souls," Pusha says of his all-star production team, which included Timbaland and Kanye West. "The album jumps out at you."



Pusha T



Singer Rachael Price

LAKE STREET DIVE FIND A NEW GROOVE

Lake Street Dive broke through with 2014's *Bad Self Portraits*, a blend of soul, Brill Building pop, Motown and jazz swing. Now they're shaking things up on the follow-up, *Side Pony* (due out February 19th)—with more disco, rock & roll and their first-ever song in a minor key. "We don't want to become a formulaic band," says bassist Bridget Kearney. "There are songs on this album that represent our next evolution."



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Digital Life After Death

Thanks to hologram technology, long-gone stars may reappear all over. But will fans buy it?

BY ANDREW LEONARD

ALKI DAVID HAS SEEN THE FUTURE, and it looks a lot like the past. David, 47, is the owner of Hologram USA, which wants to corner the market for “live” performances by 3D images of dead superstars. The company recently announced deals with the estates of Whitney Houston as well as comedians Redd Foxx and Andy Kaufman for performances and tours in 2016. Hologram USA also owns the “resurrection” rights to Patsy Cline and Buddy Holly.

In David’s vision, anything is possible. Led Zeppelin could tour with John Bonham again, or a band could simultaneously rock any number of venues around the world. “But that’s just the low-hanging fruit,” David says. “Imagine Einstein being beamed into multiple schools at the same time, to give his take on his own theorems.”

Hologram USA’s projection technology debuted in the U.S. in 2012, when Tupac Shakur “performed” at Coachella. The company is not the only one getting in on

the celebrity-resurrection game: In 2014, a rival firm, Pulse Evolution, made a splash at the *Billboard* Music Awards with a holograph of Michael Jackson performing a previously unreleased song. Pulse also owns the rights to bring back Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, and recently announced a deal with the Selena estate.

Hologram USA sued Pulse for violating its projection patents; the litigation has yet to be resolved. David told *ROLLING STONE* that he considers John Textor, executive chairman of Pulse, “the world’s greatest liar.” Textor countered that it was “fairly clear that we have already won the case,” and he went out of his way to criticize Hologram USA’s projection technology as “18 years old.”

Is there really a market for revived celebrities? So far, hologram performances have been mostly notable for their cheesy shock value. But some music-industry insiders are open to the idea, provided audiences still have an intense connection to the performer. “Whitney Houston is potentially viable,” says David Viecelli, a veteran booking agent, “but I don’t think Buddy Holly is.”

Ironically, in its current version, hologram technology doesn’t even produce what experts consider to be genuine holograms – fully three-dimensional light-forms. The CGI required for believable photo-realistic animations of dead celebrities has progressed significantly in recent years; the problem is that projection technology used for holograms lags behind.

Most holograms we see are actually just a modern twist on an optical illusion known as “Pepper’s Ghost,” which dates back 150 years, and involves little more than the reflection of a 2D image through an angled piece of translucent plastic – what one expert in 3D projection, USC film professor Paul Debevec, described as “a giant piece of Saran Wrap.”

Textor doesn’t even like to call his company’s creations holograms; he prefers “digital humans.” He’s planning a 90-minute Elvis performance that will be “a story of Broadway authenticity, with all of the scale of Las Vegas,” but an opening date has yet to be set.

There is already plenty of evidence that computer-generated versions of humans will be increasingly common. Peter Jackson’s Weta Digital “reanimated” the late Paul Walker for *Furious 7*; last year, Paul McCartney got himself 3D-scanned for an appearance in the video game *Destiny*.

For now, the main obstacle to bringing someone back to life is that a decent 3D image is needed to start with. “If I were one of these folks concerned about their legacy,” says Debevec, “I would say, ‘Before you get a day older, get yourself scanned in high resolution. Preserve yourself!’”

PHOTOGRAPH USED IN ILLUSTRATION BY BERTRAND GUAY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Bowie's Newest Surprise

Secret meetings, jazz musicians and lots of Kendrick Lamar: Inside the sessions for Bowie's adventurous new LP, 'Blackstar'

BY ANDY GREENE

ONE SUNDAY NIGHT IN THE spring of 2014, David Bowie walked into 55 Bar, a 96-year-old jazz joint tucked away on a quiet side street in New York's West Village. A friend, jazz bandleader Maria Schneider, had suggested he check out the night's headliner, a quartet led by saxophonist Donny McCaslin. Bowie grabbed a table near the stage, took in their set, then left without speaking to the band. "A server was like, 'Wait, was that David Bowie?'" McCaslin says. "It started dawning on people."

A few weeks later, McCaslin got an e-mail: Bowie wanted the band to join him in the studio. "I thought, 'This is David Bowie, and he chose *me*, and he's sending *me* an e-mail?'" McCaslin says. "I tried not to think about it too much. I just wanted to stay in the moment and just do the work [he wanted]." That work, initially, was only one song: the trippy, jazz-infused "Sue (Or in a Season of Crime)," which Bowie cut with McCaslin's band and released on his 2014 compilation album, *Nothing Has Changed*.

Then, last January, Bowie called the group to the downtown studio Magic Shop to begin work on his 25th album, *Blackstar*, which is due out on January 8th, Bowie's 69th birthday. "It did surprise me," says drummer Mark Guiliana of being asked to play on the album. "But I feel like he's built a career and artistic identity on surprises. It falls in line with who he is as an artist."

The seeds of *Blackstar* date to mid-2014, when Bowie met with longtime producer Tony Visconti and drummer Zack Alford to cut some demos at Magic Shop. Then Bowie disappeared for five months to work on the new material at his home. "He's got a little setup at his house," says Visconti. "And there was no clear communication from him until December. That's when he told me he was ready to make the album."

Two years ago, Bowie released his first album in nearly a decade, the relatively traditional (by Bowie standards) rock album *The Next Day*. For *Blackstar*, he was determined to do something very different. "We were listening to a lot of Kendrick Lamar," says Visconti. "We wound up with nothing like



BACK TO WEIRD
"In many ways, the goal was to avoid rock & roll," Bowie's producer says of his new LP.

that, but we loved the fact that Kendrick was so open-minded and he didn't do a straight-up hip-hop record. He threw everything on there, and that's exactly what we wanted to do. The goal, in many, many ways, was to avoid rock & roll."

McCaslin and his bandmates were able to handle whatever Bowie threw at them, from krautrock to hip-hop to pop. *Black-*

star begins with the 10-minute title track, a surreal, haunting song that began as two completely separate tunes before Bowie and Visconti sewed them together. The original version was actually more than 11 minutes long, but they cut it to 9:57 after learning iTunes won't post singles that cross the 10-minute mark. "It's total bullshit," says Visconti with a laugh. "But

David was adamant it be the single and he didn't want both an album version and a single version, since that gets confusing."

Bowie hasn't sung a note publicly since performing "Changes" with Alicia Keys at a charity event in 2006, and he hasn't given an interview in more than a decade. That has led to rumors that Bowie, who underwent emergency surgery for a blocked artery in 2004, is in failing health, but everyone involved with *Blackstar* insists that's not the case. "He's in fine health," says Visconti. "He's just made a very rigorous album."

Sessions for *Blackstar* often lasted seven hours, and Bowie sang at full force throughout the entire day. "He'd just go from zero to 60 once we walked out of the control room and into the studio," says Guiliana. "And his vocal performances were always just stunning, amazing." In his downtime, Bowie was working on the off-Broadway musical *Lazarus* (see sidebar), in which he was intimately involved in every aspect of production, down to casting.

The album's sense of adventure extends to the lyrics. "Tis a Pity She Was a Whore," which is powered by a hip-hop beat and free-form sax, gets its title from a 17th-century play written by English playwright John Ford, and the lyrics to "Girl Loves Me" come from Polari, a form of British slang used by gay men in mid-20th-century London. "He also took some words from *A Clockwork Orange*," says Visconti. "The lyrics are wacky, but a lot of British people, especially Londoners, will get every word." The title track repeatedly refers to a "solitary candle." "He told me it was about ISIS," says McCaslin. "It's just an unbelievable tune." (McCaslin's ISIS assertion is news to Guiliana and Visconti, who say they have no idea what the song is about.)

Bowie wrote one song in the studio, the lush ballad "Dollar Days." "One day, David just picked up a guitar," says McCaslin. "He had this little idea, and we just learned it right there in the studio. I didn't even remember it until months later, when someone told me it was on the album."

LCD Soundsystem founder James Murphy plays percussion on two tracks, though his role on the album was originally going to be much more significant. "At one point we were

A BOWIE'S LIFE Top: Bowie with his wife, Iman, at a MoMA benefit, in 2013; walking through downtown New York, where he has a home.



talking about three producers for the album: David, James and myself," says Visconti. "[Murphy] was there for a brief time, but he had his own projects to go off to." Adds Guiliana, "His role was never really defined. He brought in some synths and some percussion and had a ton of ideas."

When the band finished tracking in March, Bowie and Visconti recut most of the vocals, giving them a ghostly effect throughout the 42-minute record. "That's the hallmark of the way we work," says Visconti. "He sounds really good when we do this effect called ADT, automatic double-tracking. Then we fooled around with some rippling, repeat echoes. They're all custom-made effects."

To promote the "Blackstar" single, Bowie shot a surreal short movie where he portrays a blind prophet in space who comes across a group of scarecrow figures getting crucified. "I think I started crying when he called me," said director Johan Renck at a Brooklyn premiere event. But that video might be the last sustained glimpse Bowie fans get for now. "I don't think he's ever going to play live again," says Visconti. "If he does, it will be a total surprise."

Bowie is clearly determined to let the album speak for him. "When he put out albums like *Heroes* and *Low*, no one was doing anything like that," says Visconti. "And then he gave birth to the New Romantic scene. He's a genre-breaker, and I can't wait for the *Blackstar* imitation albums to start coming out."

Bowie's Anti-Musical

Why 'Lazarus' is unlike any Broadway show you've ever seen

The Man Who Fell to Earth, David Bowie's art-house film from 1976, ends with the main character — an ageless alien played by Bowie — stranded on Earth and heartbroken after losing the love of his life. Bowie's new off-Broadway musical, *Lazarus* — which opens on December 7th at the tiny New York Theatre Workshop — picks up the story 40 years later, with *Dexter* star Michael C. Hall taking over the role. Bowie was intimately involved in the production, writing four new songs (at least one of which appears on his new LP, *Blackstar*) for it.

Bowie picked Belgian director Ivo van Hove to helm *Lazarus*. "I didn't want it to become a jukebox musical," van Hove says. "I wanted it

to be one story all together, music and theater." There are a handful of Bowie classics, but most songs are either lesser-known tunes like 1980's "It's No Game, Pt. 1" or selections from his past two albums.

Bowie, who starred in a production of *The Elephant Man* in 1980, has long wanted to bring his music to the stage.

Hall and
Cristin
Milioti



"He said it was his dream," van Hove says. "His idea was to do a story where [the character] is stuck on Earth 40 years later. And he wanted a girl in a central role."

Hall's co-star is Sophia Anne Caruso, 14, who appeared in NBC's live version of *The Sound of Music* in 2013. She steals the show every time she's onstage, especially when she sings "Life on Mars." "David and I were at her audition," says van Hove. "We looked at each other and said, 'Yes.' We didn't have to see any girls after her."

The show's run is sold out, and there are currently no plans to bring *Lazarus* to Broadway. "For now," says van Hove, "I just want to make the best show on Earth."

ANDY GREENE

**CHECK OUT MY
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**LIVE LIFE
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WHEN CHRIS STAPLETON's debut album, *Traveller*, hit Number One on the charts in November, no one was more surprised than Stapleton himself. "It's wonderfully strange – not something I ever expected," says the 37-year-old country singer. Stapleton, who comes from a long line of Kentucky coal miners, spent 14 years in Nashville, briefly fronting a bluegrass band and writing hits for Tim McGraw, Luke Bryan and Darius Rucker, before making *Traveller*. The album sidesteps modern Nashville slickness in favor of classic barroom twang – including a cover of "Tennessee Whiskey," a 1983 hit for George Jones. Stapleton recently performed it with Justin Timberlake at the CMA Awards. "I love working with people, regardless of genre – country, rock & roll, whatever," Stapleton says. "I just called Justin, and he said yes. We spent a lot of time talking about music, especially Bill Withers."

Your influences are all over the map. Which album have you played more than any other in your life?

My favorite record of all time is Tom Petty's *Wildflowers*. I hold it as the standard – in terms of sonics, sequencing and songs. It shows that making a complete record is important, rather than just making a single. I think we've forgotten that a bit.

Merle Haggard has said he's sick of hearing about tractors, beer and the beach in country music. It seems like your album is proof we're moving on from bro-country.

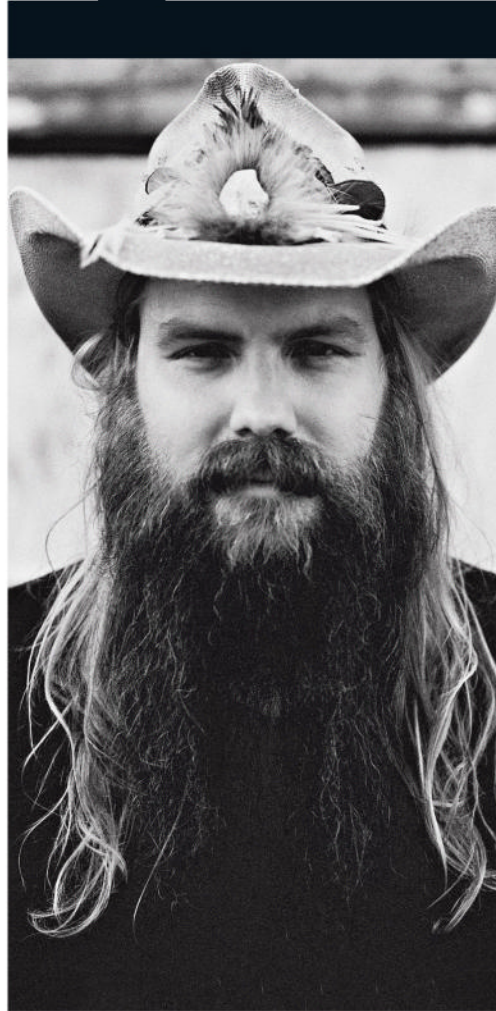
Well, country music has always had tractors, beers and beaches. Hank Jr. and Buck Owens sang about that stuff. I get tired of people trying to dog out the radio for not playing this or that. There are lots of people who like what they play – otherwise, they wouldn't play it. **Your voice has been described in print as "100 proof" or "liquor-thick and three-drinks limber." What do you actually drink?**

I like a bourbon from Kentucky called Colonel E.H. Taylor. It's kind of hard to find. I like most [bourbons], in fact.

You've been touring for many years. What's the worst gig you ever played?

There were a lot of rough neighborhoods in the South. At the time, you're thinking, "Man, this is the worst." Then a few years pass and you wear it like a badge of honor: "Hey, man, remember we were afraid we were gonna get stabbed, and there

Q&A



Chris Stapleton

This year's breakout country star on topping the pop charts, drinking with Bill Murray, and what he learned from Tom Petty

BY PATRICK DOYLE

were gang signs everywhere and used condoms in the parking lot? That was fun."

What do you do when you're not making music?

I like to fish. I collect pocketknives. I inherited a nice collection from my father and grandfather. I was a bit of a pocketknife junkie for a while.

Why pocketknives?

Among my dad's generation, when you gave another man a pocketknife as a gift, it was a show of respect. I'll still give someone the knife out of my pocket. It's harder nowadays, though – airplanes don't let you on with pocketknives anymore. **You've said *Traveller* was inspired by a road trip you took just after your dad died in 2013. How so?**

My wife bought me a 1979 Jeep Cherokee and we drove it through the desert in New Mexico, as kind of a head-clearing moment. We didn't plan on how cold it was gonna be. We were trying to stay warm and we had to swap out the battery at one point. But that part of the country is almost a spiritual place to be. I wrote the title song to *Traveller* in the desert. **Timberlake and Pharrell have both come to your shows. Has anybody else famous showed up?**

Bill Murray showed up in Charleston, South Carolina. I was in a film with him years ago [Stapleton's former band the SteelDrivers were featured on the soundtrack to 2010's *Get Low*]. He's an enthusiastic music lover, so he really elevated the crowd. He's a bit of a hype man. We hung out after the show, and it was very interesting.

What did you guys do after the show?

We went to the place next door and stayed till it closed. I was drinking bourbon, I think he was drinking wine. The conversation ran the gamut – it was the kind of thing that could take a turn at any moment. He has a lot of interesting philosophies.

If you can imagine a conversation with a compilation of all of those characters he's played – from *Caddyshack* to *Lost in Translation* – then you can imagine a conversation with him. I wasn't gonna ask him for *Caddyshack* stories, though.

You've got a pretty powerful beard. How did that come about?

Probably laziness, more than anything. I used to get a lot of *Duck Dynasty* jokes there for a minute. I've had the beard for about a dozen years – my wife has never seen my chin. It's not quite ZZ Top, but I don't shave every day either. It is what it is, and I'm OK with that.



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RandomNotes



Adele at Radio City (right) and Joe's Pub (above), where she first played in 2008.



Adele in New York: Rollin' in the Streets

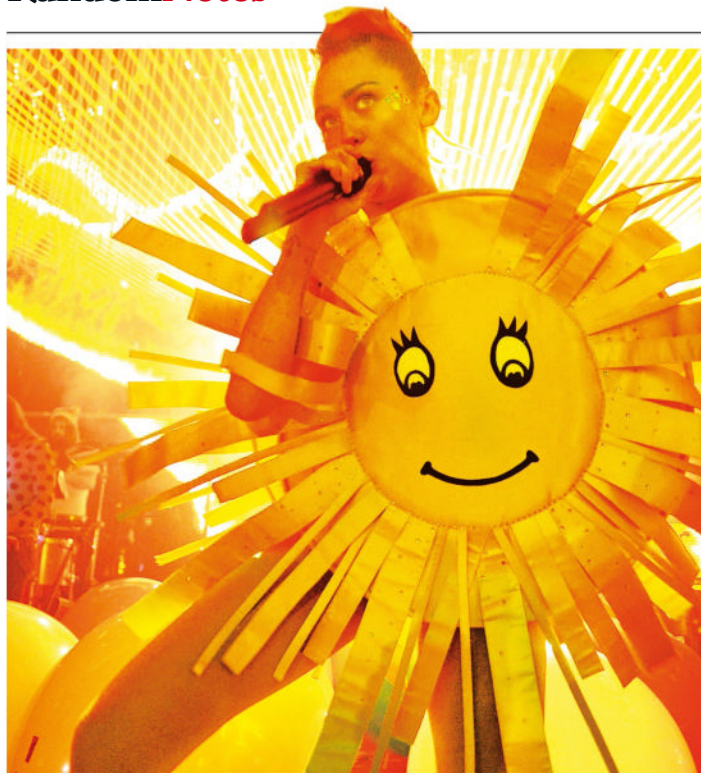
On the same day her new album, *25*, sold a breathtaking 900,000 copies, Adele celebrated its release with a set at the tiny New York club Joe's Pub with 200 impossibly lucky fans. (The same week, she also hit two slightly-less-underground spots, Radio City Music Hall and *Saturday Night Live*.) "I love New York," says the singer, who used to divide her time between the city and London. "I was about to move there, and then I got pregnant. I have a million memories."

JOCK-ROCK TALK Giants superfan Jon Bon Jovi made nice with opposing quarterback Tom Brady in New Jersey. The singer is readying his band's next album, slated for release in 2016.



JIGGA WHAT, JETER WHO? Derek Jeter and Jay Z – who once called the ex-Yankee "a classic example of a winner" – bro-hugged at the Staples Center in L.A. Jay's mood went downhill a few days later when boxer Miguel Cotto, whom he represents, lost to Canelo Alvarez in Las Vegas, costing the rapper \$100,000 in a charity bet.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: T. JACKSON/INPHOTO.COM; KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR IHEARTADIO; JAMES DEVANEY/GC IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; MARK J. TERRILL/AP IMAGES; ROBERT DEUTSCH/USA TODAY SPORTS/SIPA USA



Miley Brightens Up America

Miley Cyrus and Her Dead Petz (a.k.a. the Flaming Lips) kicked off their U.S. tour in Chicago with a show that featured everything from a live puppy to an 18-inch prosthetic penis she strapped on for the finale. "People were shocked!" Cyrus said later. "I thought that part was over."



MR. NELSON GOES TO WASHINGTON The day before receiving the prestigious Gershwin Prize for songwriting, Willie Nelson met up with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.



TWO LEGENDS Bruce Springsteen played "American Skin (41 Shots)" with John Legend at an L.A. anti-racism benefit. "It was an honor to play with one of the great American songwriters," says Legend.



BEEN A LONG TIME Jimmy Page jumped onstage in Seattle to play "Rock and Roll" with Paul Rodgers, Soundgarden's Kim Thayil and Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen.



Turkey Dogg

Snoop Dogg pulled up in style to the annual turkey giveaway at the Forum in the Inglewood section of L.A., then helped hand out 1,500 birds. "Inglewood is my second home," he says. "Y'all been good to me since Day One!"





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ALBUMS *of* THE YEAR

Kendrick fought the power; Adele soared higher; D'Angelo shocked the world



SARAH MCCOLGAN

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Lamar



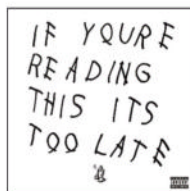
1 | **Kendrick Lamar** *To Pimp a Butterfly*

Musically, lyrically and emotionally, Kendrick Lamar's third album is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece – a sprawling epic that's both the year's most bumptious party music and its most gripping therapy session. A rap superstar at last, after years on the underground grind, Lamar wrestles with the depression and survivor's guilt that followed his success by turning to heroes from Ralph Ellison and Richard Pryor to Smokey Robinson and Tupac. He lives large. He contains multitudes. Leading the charge to bring live instrumentation back to hip-hop, he calls forth a sound as ambitious and challenging as his rhymes: sci-fi funk on "Wesley's Theory," free jazz on "For Free?," steady G-funk on "King Kunta." Over all this, Lamar interrogates himself and a country where everything from his ancestors to his art has always been for sale. Alone in a hotel room, he finds himself at a crossroads: "I didn't want to self-destruct... so I went running for answers." The search is never-ending.



2 Adele
25

The feverish four-year wait for the follow-up to Adele's triple-platinum blockbuster, *21*, was unlike anything we've seen this decade – and she didn't disappoint on this thunderous triumph. *25* tells the story of a young woman making her uneasy peace with adulthood, like Carole King on *Tapestry*. The pop-savvy “Water Under the Bridge” and the soaring piano ballad “Remedy” take on relationship drama with realist fire, while the lighthearted “Sweetest Devotion” dances right into ecstasy. Adele and her A-list co-conspirators (Max Martin, Tobias Jesso Jr.) fly from drum-cannon Eighties balladry to classic gospel and blues to the kind of piano power surges that are her epic signature, holding it all together with the nuanced, towering vocal performances that have already made her iconic. “If you're not the one for me/Then how come I can bring you to your knees?” she sings. On *25*, she does it over and over again.



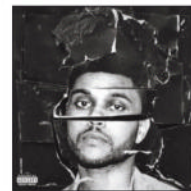
3 Drake
If You're Reading This It's Too Late

What a time to be Drake. Toronto's finest enjoyed a hell of a year, and it all started with this – his purest hip-hop move in ages, which he called a mixtape even though it sold through the roof. No pop hooks, no romance, just a tightly sequenced set of rap cuts where he plays directly to his base by venting his anger and paranoia. He disses his own record label and kvetches about groupies as only he can: “I got bitches asking me about the code for the Wi-Fi.” He even complains about driving his girl to her bar exam through the snow – perhaps the most Drake-ish grouse ever. This is the darkest record he's ever made, yet it easily cleared a million copies sold in a year when virtually no one else did. Even when Aubrey Drake Graham downplays his pop side, he runs the game.



4 D'Angelo and the Vanguard
Black Messiah

Does this guy know how to pick a moment, or what? D'Angelo dropped his first LP since 2000 in the final days of 2014, as his big statement on America in a year of deep racial turmoil. After a year of listening, *Black Messiah* stands even taller. The songs take their time to build a plush, meditative live-band soul groove in the vein of Sly Stone or Prince. D speaks his piece about police violence in “The Charade” (“All we wanted was a chance to talk/’Stead we only got outlined in chalk”) and unleashes his inner guitar hero in “1000 Deaths.” The showstopper is “Another Life” – six minutes of piano, sitar and falsetto, stretching into D'Angelo's infinite future. Even if we have to wait another 15 years for the next chapter, it'll take at least that long to truly absorb *Black Messiah*.



5 The Weeknd
Beauty Behind the Madness

Canada's Abel Tesfaye redefined what it means to be an R&B auteur with his breakthrough second LP. After a series of mysterious mixtape releases built around weeded-out goth moodiness (and one half-baked major-label debut, in 2011), he went for full-on Top 40 grandeur this time, without diluting any of his eerie allure. The sumptuous Max Martin joint “Can't Feel My Face” got America dancing to a sex-as-cocaine metaphor, thanks to a joyful hook Michael Jackson could have moonwalked to; “In the Night” amped up the violent undercurrents of MJ circa *Bad* while still feeling like a party; and bleary ballads like “Earned It” and “The Hills” spun gossamer sensuality into unlikely hit singles. Who else but the Weeknd could make a line like “Only my mother could love me for me” work as pillow talk? It's just that kind of raw honesty that makes him such a revolutionary player.

To dive further into the best albums, singles and more, go to RollingStone.com/music/best-of-2015.



6 Courtney Barnett
Sometimes I Sit and Think, and Sometimes I Just Sit

The year's best debut came from a 27-year-old Australian indie-rock artist so talented she can sing about insomnia or house-hunting with the wit and insight of Dylan in '65.



7 Jason Isbell
Something More Than Free

The most thoughtful roots-rock songwriter of his generation delivers a stunning chronicle of Southern life, full of unforgettable characters and indelible images like “Jack and Coke in your mama's car/You were reading *The Bell Jar*.”



8 Various Artists
Hamilton: Original Broadway Cast Recording

Lin-Manuel Miranda's smash musical turned “the 10-dollar Founding Father without a father” into a hip-hop hero. Who needs Broadway tickets when the soundtrack is such a fantastically fun ride?



9 The Arcs
Yours, Dreamily

Dan Auerbach cuts loose with a few pals who sound like they dig the Latin Playboys. “Stay in My Corner” is R&B noir, spiked with psychedelic flourishes; “Cold Companion” is prairie doo-wop, like the Eagles busting through the saloon door.



10 | **Blur**
The Magic Whip

Blur named their first full-lineup set since 1999 after a brand of Chinese firecracker – an apt allusion to the explosive jolts and emotional shrapnel embedded in the Kinks-like stroll of “Lonesome Street” and the tender glow of “Mirrorball.”



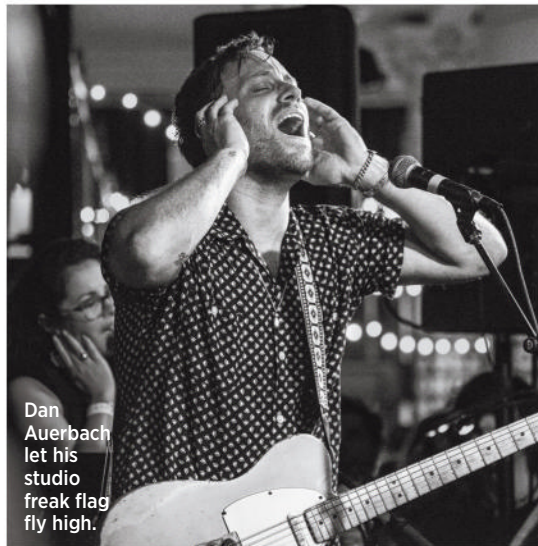
11 | **Sleater-Kinney**
No Cities to Love

The Nineties’ fiercest band returned from hiatus with its toughest record ever. “Hope’s a burden, or it sets you free,” they sing on the scorching title tune – a line Bruce Springsteen could have written.



12 | **Lana Del Rey**
Honeymoon

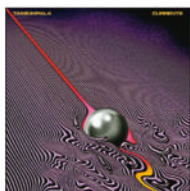
The saddest swinger in Hollywood has never sounded more powerful than on this torch-glam triumph. Del Rey delivers majestic heartache on “High by the Beach” and “Salvatore.” She even sounds sexy reading a T.S. Eliot poem on “Burnt Norton.”



Dan Auerbach let his studio freak flag fly high.



Florence Welch went louder and bigger.



13 | **Tame Impala**
Currents

Aussie dreamer Kevin Parker stepped up his vision in a big way on his synth-soaked third album. It’s packed with psychedelic studio wizardry from a blissed-out dude who can make finger snaps sound like spaced-out revelation.



14 | **Wilco**
Star Wars

Wilco’s best record in a decade touches on everything that makes them great: refined noise, easy-riding car-radio sweetness and Jeff Tweedy’s honeyed songcraft. It felt like a greatest hits, except all the songs were brand-new.



15 | **Father John Misty**
I Love You, Honeybear

On his second album as Father John Misty, singer-songwriter Josh Tillman painted a vivid picture of love gone mad, filling tunes like “Bored in the USA” and “Holy Shit” with lush melodies and plenty of barbed irony.

16. Jack Ü
Skrillex and Diplo Present Jack Ü

The world’s top beat freaks invite Bieber and 2 Chainz to their mind-twisting EDM fiesta.

17. Keith Richards
Crosseyed Heart

Keith’s first solo set in 23 years is his best ever – and his most lovably eccentric.

18. Boz Scaggs
A Fool to Care

A concise history of American soul, with stellar renditions of tunes by Fats Domino, Huey “Piano” Smith and more.

19. Kurt Vile
B’lieve I’m Goin Down...

An introspective guitar hero turns his couch musings into stoner-folk magic.

20. Don Henley
Cass County

A native Texan goes back to his roots, with an album of rich-soil covers and meticulous pure-country storytelling.

21. Chris Stapleton
Traveler

After years of writing other people’s hits, a Nashville vet makes his excellent tradition-minded debut.

22. Florence and the Machine
How Big How Blue How Beautiful

An arty diva leans heavy on rock and soul. An awesome reinvention ensues.

23. Mark Knopfler
Tracker

Knopfler channels Celtic folk, Dylan and the Dead as he looks back on life with stoic grace.

24. Donnie Trumpet and the Social Experiment
Surf

Acid-rap pathfinder Chance the Rapper swerves left with a radiant set of utopian soul jazz.

25. Darlene Love
Introducing Darlene Love

At 74, a girl-group great sings Springsteen and Costello songs on an agelessly vibrant LP.

SINGLES *of* THE YEAR

The Weeknd hit an ultimate high, Fetty Wap made a gangsta love song, Drake blew up our cellphones, Courtney Barnett rocked out while she freaked out, and more

1 The Weeknd

Can't Feel My Face

It was the “oooooh!” that changed everything. That single ecstatic syllable, slipping out just before each chorus, transformed Abel Tesfaye (a.k.a. the Weeknd) from a cult R&B singer to a full-on pop star – just as decisively as a similar yelp of joy marked a new era in Michael Jackson’s career when “Don’t Stop ’Til You Get Enough” hit 36 years earlier. Max Martin’s satin-smooth production helped, too, vaulting “Can’t Feel My Face” straight to Number One on the pop charts with Scandinavian efficiency. But Tesfaye’s show-stopping vocal performance is what makes it an instant classic. He spends the song remaking himself as a pop giant – cleverly disguising his obsession with drugs beneath a metaphor about a dangerously hot fling, and playing down his angst-y tendencies until there’s just a hint of existential pain in his lighter-than-air falsetto. By the time the song is over, you’ll do anything for another hit.



The Weeknd

2 Fetty Wap

Trap Queen

The year’s biggest brand-new star sent a stylish “Hey, what’s up, hello” from Paterson, New Jersey, to the entire world. Fetty Wap conquered the radio with a gangsta love song – behind that nuclear-level catchy hook is the tale of a criminal-

minded hustle for two, a *Scarface* dream where Fetty and his trap queen can cook up hell-a-illegal pies and ride high together forever. It definitely says something about our crazy times that the most credible romantic fantasy out there is about a drug-slinging couple, but perhaps that’s what we’ve come to. A pair of matching Lambos? Now that’s true love.

3 Drake

Hotline Bling

A vintage Seventies drum-machine sample powers Drake’s exquisitely rueful remembrance of booty calls past. Now all he can do is miss that girl, brood about her new life at the club and dance like the world’s biggest fool for love.

4 Courtney Barnett

Pedestrian at Best

The most thrilling four minutes in rock in 2015: garage-y guitar crunch and a darkly hilarious rant lead to a chorus that your favorite Nineties alt band would have eaten its Doc Martens to have written.

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5 | **Jamie xx** *I Know There's Gonna Be (Good Times)*

2015's sunniest summer jam came from the unlikely trio of Jamie xx, Young Thug and Jamaican toaster Popcaan – plus sweet R&B harmonies sampled from the Persuasions, for a true street-corner symphony.

6 | **Adele** *Hello*

When Adele says “hello,” people listen – like, tens of millions of them. Whether she was singing to an ex (as the video seemed to imply) or to her younger self (as she's maintained), this achingly intense ballad hit home like an emotional sledgehammer.

7 | **Kendrick Lamar** *King Kunta*

The fiercest and most funk-adelic track on *To Pimp a Butterfly* takes aim at everything from Lamar's haters to “the power that be.” We already knew Kendrick was a great lyricist; turns out he's kind of a badass, too.

8 | **Future** *Fuck Up Some Commas*

From Atlanta to Pluto, the man who's dubbed himself “Future Hendrix” came back strong in 2015, taking a money shower – thousands, millions, the more commas the better – over a siren-laced banger of a beat.

9 | **Tobias Jesso Jr.** *How Could You Babe*

The NBA-tall Canadian with the Harry Nilsson voice stole our hearts with this defeated piano ballad about watching an old flame move on without you. No wonder Adele tapped him to co-write a song for *25* after this.



Lana Del Rey

10 | **Jack Ü and Justin Bieber** *Where Are Ü Now*

EDM superfriends Skrillex and Diplo rescue the Bieb from celebrity purgatory, bending and processing his voice into a trippy space-dolphin croon that was one of the year's most instantly indelible sounds.

11 | **The Weeknd** *The Hills*

The Weeknd's second Number One smash of 2015 is much more like the guy we knew from his old mixtapes: Horror-movie shrieks and stormy electronics punctuate his seductive moans about a nihilistic affair, and somehow it's all catchy as hell.

12 | **Foals** *What Went Down*

Ambitious British art-rock dudes reboot their sound with a seething guitar epic that sounds like Radiohead and *My Morning Jacket* going in together on a souped-up space vessel and setting the controls for the heart of the sun.

13 | **Bully** *Trying*

In a year that was lousy with great young Nineties-drunk guitar bands, Bully stood apart – channeling Hole and Veruca Salt with loads of heart and resilience on this gold-plated shouter about toughing out a so-called life.

14 | **The Arcs** *Stay in My Corner*

A sweet falsetto-soul valentine from Black Keys frontman Dan Auerbach's other band, complete with a hook that splits the difference between Curtis Mayfield-style guitar heat and the pretty melody of John Lennon's “Jealous Guy.”

15 | **Grimes** *Flesh Without Blood*

Addictive dance pop as only Canadian oddball Claire Boucher could conceive of it: A chrome-shiny liberation anthem full of turbocharged electro beats and airy, ghost-diva hooks. It's currently ruling the clubs on Mars.

16. Madonna *Ghosttown*
An indomitable power ballad for a ruined world that sounds so great you might start rooting for the apocalypse.

17. **Tame Impala** *Let It Happen*

Somehow this impossibly warm, pillowy synth-pop groove reminds us of Syd Barrett partying with Gary Numan.

18. **Lana Del Rey** *High by the Beach*

This narcotically catchy anthem was prime Lana in a year when we often just wanted to take up and stare at some waves.

19. **Nathaniel Rateliff and the Night Sweats** *S.O.B.*

“Son of a bitch, give me a drink!” 2015's wildest vintage-soul rave-up came from an ex-folkie straight out of Denver.

20. **Alabama Shakes** *Don't Wanna Fight*

The Shakes get way down into the groove on what might be their dankest, funkier tune to date. Brittany Howard's opening howl is a hurricane.

21. Alessia Cara *Here*
A sneakily hook-y hit about the universal struggle of feeling mad bored at a party.

22. **Donnie Trumpet and the Social Experiment** *Sunday Candy*

The best hip-hop song about a grandma, ever, courtesy of Chance the Rapper.

23. Beck *Dreams*
Beck shook off those *Morning Phase* blues with this slinky disco jam. Please: More happy Beck in 2016!

24. **Chvrches** *Leave a Trace*

The finest neo-New Wave song of the year, from a Scottish band that made a ton of 'em.

25. Dawes
All Your Favorite Bands
This update on “Forever Young” gave us the rock-fan prayer of the year: “May all your favorite bands stay together.”



THE NEW HOLIDAY SPICE FLAT WHITE

Two bold ristretto shots of **Christmas Blend Espresso Roast**
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BEST TV of THE YEAR

From cyber-punk hackers to hipster girls gone wild and leopard-print-loving divas, 2015 was one great year for our national pastime: binge-watching

By Rob Sheffield

1 | Mr. Robot USA

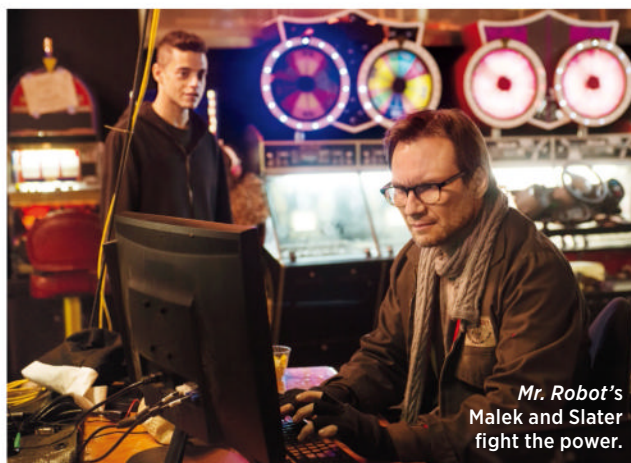
Welcome to right now: A shy tech geek in a black hoodie gets recruited into an underground squad of vigilante hackers with a Coney Island clubhouse. Their mission: Take down the capitalist system. *Mr. Robot* is easily the year's most audacious drama – a punk psycho-thriller full of anti-corporate sabotage, paranoia and heavy drugs. (All the revolutionary talk is even more surprising on USA Network, of all places.) Newcomer Rami Malek is fantastic as the hacker, with Christian Slater as his grizzled guru Mr. Robot.

2 | Mad Men AMC

Talk about going out on top. The Sterling Cooper crew saved some of its most unforgettable moments for the end: Don Draper stranded on a desert bus-stop bench, a Buddy Holly tune in his head; Peggy Olson doing her glam strut into the office, rocking her shades and cigarette. And that ingenious final scene: Don meditating at a yoga retreat, reaching his moment of Zen as he realizes he wants to sell the world a Coke.

3 | Broad City Comedy Central

In 2015, all pop culture aspires to the condition of *Broad City*. It's the adventures of Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer as two BFFs raising hell in the city – dressing slutty for funerals, shopping for the right strap-



on to peg the guy next door, or fantasizing about their own funerals. Says Glazer, "I want everyone I've ever hooked up with to jerk off together."

4 | The Americans FX

Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys as two deep-cover 1980s Soviet spies in the suburbs. Their family life is based on lies and betrayals – which is exactly what makes them authentic Americans. The most shocking moment: After she breaks a tooth in a fight, they can't go to a dentist, so she needs DIY dental work. When he pulls out her tooth, it's a moment of agony – but weirdly, it also plays like the year's most intense sex scene.

5 | Difficult People Hulu

2015's most brilliant new comedy, starring two of the year's most hilariously repulsive creeps. Julie Klausner and Billy Eichner make life miserable for anyone unlucky enough to

sit near them at a funeral, an *Annie* matinee or pretty much anywhere. With relentless hostility – "I was told I can't have children...because I hate them" – Klausner and Eichner capture the romance of falling in hate with the human race.

6 | Empire Fox

How exactly did we all function before we met Cookie? There was a Cookie-shape hole in our hearts, with room for a leopard-print fedora. The hip-hop soap became the year's surprise blockbuster, thanks to Taraji P. Henson's gangsta matriarch, Cookie. Pray us out, Cookie: "And God, please do not withhold your blessings, even from ho's that hire skanks to spy on me. Amen."

7 | Fargo FX

The slimy underbelly of a small Minnesota town at the end of the Seventies: A murder at the Waffle Hut leads to a web of

crime and corruption. The first season took off from the Coen brothers' film, but this is an entirely new story, as Patrick Wilson's Vietnam-vet cop faces Bokeem Woodbine's super-smooth killer. It's a heartland crime tale that doubles as a snapshot of the whole country.

8 | Veep HBO

"You are the worst thing to happen to this country since food in buckets. And maybe slavery." Now that she's president, Julia Louis-Dreyfus' Selina Meyer has never been nastier, and neither has the political satire on *Veep*. After that election-night cliffhanger – "I've known sailors less likely to go either way than this" – nobody can say what's next for her presidency. But, please, four more years.

9 | Better Call Saul AMC

Who could have predicted this *Breaking Bad* prequel would turn out this great? It stands on its own as a comic desert noir. Bob Odenkirk fills every scene with the dank odor of a small-time shyster's flop sweat.

10 | Last Week Tonight With John Oliver HBO

It definitely says something about our insane times that the only TV journalist anyone can still trust is this joker. Week after week, headline after headline, he makes everybody else in the game look like the lightweight they are.

MAKE A PLAN TO MAKE IT HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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a cab or designate a driver.



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THE FIGHT OF OUR TIME

Secretary of State John Kerry on the challenges that lie ahead at the United Nations Climate Summit

★ By Jeff Goodell ★

ON A RAINY DAY IN MID-November, Secretary of State John Kerry stood on the bridge of the *USS San Antonio*, a state-of-the-art ship designed to deliver up to 800 Marines ashore via helicopters and landing craft. From the bridge, Kerry had a commanding view of Naval Station Norfolk, the largest naval base in the world: aircraft carriers to the left, battleships to the right, a panorama of military power – and one that is rapidly sinking beneath the rising waters of Chesapeake Bay.

As Navy officials told Kerry in an informal briefing aboard the *San Antonio*, the base was highly vulnerable to sea-level rise. Already, roads connecting the base to the city of Norfolk, Virginia, flood during major rainstorms. At high tide, water surges over the sea walls, threatening key infrastructure and inundating buildings. Kerry, dressed in a sharp blue suit and pink-orange tie, asked the officers about the life expectancy of the base. “Twenty to 50 years,” Capt. J. Pat Rios told him.

There was a slight but perceptible pause among the naval officers and State Department officials on the bridge. It was an extraordinary moment in the annals of American military history: A U.S. naval captain had just told the secretary of state that this strategically important base, home to six aircraft carriers and key to operations in Europe and the Middle East, would be essentially inoperable in as little as 20 years. Yes, they could shore up the sea walls for a while. Yes, they could raise roads. But without the massive influx of billions of dollars to fortify and elevate the city of Norfolk, as well as the roads and railroads that connect it to the surrounding region, the base was doomed.

Kerry asked a few follow-up questions about what was being done now to buy more time, but he hardly seemed perturbed. Part of the reason for that may have been that this daylong tour was a brief diversion from his larger nightmares in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, which were underscored three days later by the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed 129 people. But a larger part of the reason was that the troubles at the naval base were hardly news to Kerry. He has



THE LEADER
“You can’t let concerns stop you – they drive you,” Kerry says.

been talking about the national-security implications of climate change for years. But now, reality is starting to catch up with him. Recent studies have shown that the war in Syria was likely exacerbated by drought and famine. The flood of refugees that is overrunning Europe is offering the world a glimpse of what will happen as the globe heats up. The rapidly thawing Arctic, with its fossil-fuel riches, has become a playground for Russia and China. Nobody has done a better job of adding up what all this means than John Kerry. In fact, in Kerry’s mind, the trou-

bled future of Naval Station Norfolk, the refugee chaos in Europe, the rise of Islamic terrorism and the grinding war in Syria are all accelerated and complicated by our collective failure to take meaningful action to reduce carbon pollution and minimize the impacts of climate change.

As secretary of state, Kerry has accomplished a great deal, including a historic arms deal with Iran. He has also had notable failures, including an attempt to broker a peace deal in the Middle East that fell apart at the last minute. At 72, Kerry has a stamina and appetite

for negotiation that are epic. His aides like to point out he has flown nearly 1 million miles since taking office in early 2013. The patrician aloofness that sometimes kept him from connecting with crowds during his 2004 presidential run is not a problem on the diplomatic circuit. "He was born to be secretary of state," says Heather Zichal, a longtime Kerry aide who went on to become President Obama's climate and energy adviser during his first term.

In the climate wars, however, Kerry is a forgotten soldier. Al Gore won all the glory (and the ridicule), and President Obama has the muscle. But the truth is, no one has done more in the trenches of this battle than Kerry. He has been in the fight since the first Earth Day, in 1970, and has not let up since, participating in practically every climate conference and U.N. climate meeting in the past 30 years. It helps that he is from an environmentally conscious state like Massachusetts, but his interest in climate change has been anything but politically expedient—he did not shy away from talking about it when he ran for president in 2004, even when pollsters told him it was foolish. He pushed hard for cap-and-trade legislation in Obama's first term (and, despite Obama's less-than-full-fledged support, might have gotten it done had not his pal Sen. John McCain, long a supporter of action on climate change, gone MIA on the issue after he lost the 2008 election). As secretary of state, Kerry was one of the prime movers behind last year's historic U.S.-China deal, in which China agreed to significant carbon reductions and which helped break the bottleneck in U.N. climate negotiations. (I traveled for several days with Kerry in China last year while he was working on a trade agreement with the country, and was astonished by how he opened every meeting, no matter what the subject or who the Chinese officials



FIGHTING ISIL Kerry outside the U.S. Embassy in Paris a few days after the attacks in November

were, with a few words about the urgency of climate change.)

After touring the base in Norfolk, Kerry gave a speech at Old Dominion University that tried to sum up the connections between climate change and national security. "The bottom line is that the impacts of climate change can exacerbate resource competition, threaten livelihoods, and increase the risk of instability and conflict, especially in places already undergoing economic, political and social stress," Kerry said. "And because the world is so extraordinarily interconnected today—economically, technologically, militarily, in every way imaginable—instability anywhere can be a threat to stability everywhere." Kerry's audience was not just the several hundred Virginia dignitaries and students gathered at Old Dominion, but also Republicans in Congress who were gearing up to derail the upcoming U.N. climate talks in Paris, which both Kerry and Obama see as an important turning point in the fight against climate change. In effect, Kerry was saying

to climate deniers in Congress: If Paris fails, terrorists win.

In Norfolk, Kerry and I talked in the VIP lounge at the base before his tour of the complex, and then again during his flight back to Washington, D.C., on a government-issue refurbished 757, which he shares with other top Obama officials. As we talked, Kerry took his coat off and picked at a bowl of fresh fruit, his voice hoarse after a long day. He looked exhausted, his face more drawn than usual; talking to him, it was hard not to feel the weight of the world. After the terrorist attacks in Paris, we caught up again briefly by phone while he was on his way back from Vienna and Paris.

To most people, climate change is an environmental issue. It's something that affects trees and frogs and weather. Why should Americans think about climate change as a security issue?

Because it is. Sixteen members on the board of the Center for Naval Analysis, who are all flag officers—generals, admi-

TOP: DOMINIQUE FAGET/AFP/GETTY IMAGES. BOTTOM: FROM LEFT: THE WHITE HOUSE; ANDREW HARRER/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL B. THOMAS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; GLEN JOHNSON/U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT; JAMES WHITE/EI; GENERAL WILLS; DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"; KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES; LAURA LEZZA/GETTY IMAGES; GRATEFUL DEAD

2015 THE YEAR IN THREAT ASSESSMENT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY



WITH US

SCOTUS brings gay marriage to America.

Bye-bye, Keystone XL pipeline.

America is forced to confront #blacklivesmatter.

White House hammers out historic nuke deal with Iran.

Everybody's all-American Caitlyn Jenner

U.S. women's soccer team wins its third World Cup.

Pope Francis, global superstar

The Grateful Dead tour one last time.

erals, three-star, four-star, retired – have all said this is a major threat multiplier. And there are many different ways in which a security challenge can emerge. You have drought, therefore, perhaps, huge food shortages. Where there is water today, there may not be in the future. That could cause mass migrations. That creates conflict. The water itself – there are wars over water. Already, tribes are fighting in part of the Sahel and other places where water once existed, and now it's dried up. There's a history of conflict where resources are finite or scarce.

So if you look around the world, the potential for mass dislocation is rising exponentially right now. We saw massive numbers of people uprooted in Syria and moving into Damascus. The drought in the region did not cause what happened,

ponent of our efforts on climate change, which is very scary because we're behind the curve in terms of what we need to keep it to 2 degrees Celsius, which is the tipping point of allowable warming. And we're just not making it. And we're not going to make it in Paris in terms of that, but that's not the objective. We understand that.

What we will do in Paris, I hope, is gather a head of steam with a message to the marketplace that is significant enough. If 150 nations are taking it seriously and setting targets, even if they don't make them, that will generate massive investment and a huge amount of private-sector activity. And then you have to hope that somebody comes up with clean-energy technology, which makes it competitive with fossil fuel, and then, boom, you get your low-carbon economy.

Well, we've done more than mitigate. President Obama has set up his Climate Action Plan. It is not mitigation; it is geared to try to prevent the problem. We have a 26 to 28 percent target for reductions by 2030. We're looking at 2050 goals now. We've upped the requirements on trucks, upped the requirements on cars. We've doubled efficiency. We've got efficiencies in our air conditioning. We've got the power-plant rule.

But you're absolutely correct. We do mobilize normally when we have this kind of threat, and that's why I'm here in Norfolk: to underscore that this is a national-security threat and we need a broader response.

But given the kind of global chaos you articulated – not to mention that we can foresee the end of cities like Miami as we

“CLIMATE CHANGE IS A NATIONAL-SECURITY THREAT, AND WE NEED A BROADER RESPONSE. BUT WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO – PEOPLE IN THE SENATE DENY ITS EXISTENCE.”

but it exacerbated what happened. It creates greater instability.

Were the Paris terrorist attacks further evidence of the link between climate change, global instability and terrorism?

Well, it certainly underscores the global nature of Daesh. It's not directly related to climate change, but it's part of the web of global interconnectedness – and it shows how one security challenge is a challenge for everybody.

A few months ago, during the Arctic summit in Alaska, you called the refugee crisis in Europe a preview of what's to come.

Everything is a preview right now, because the course we're on has created an inevitability to X amount of warming. And we're already into the mitigation com-

What impact did the Paris terrorist attacks have on the momentum for the climate talks?

If they have an impact, it will be that everybody realizes that you gotta get things done, not talk about them. So maybe there will be a little spill-over momentum. But the bigger impact will be on Syria and the counter-Daesh coalition.

In the past, when America's been faced with major security threats, we've mobilized in big ways. Think about what we did to prepare for World War II. With climate, we have done nothing on that scale. Basically, all we've done is try to mitigate emissions, and we haven't even done a very good job of that. If climate change is such a major threat to our security, shouldn't we be doing far more to combat it?

know it within our children's lifetimes – it seems to me that we have a long way to go in really thinking about the scale of this threat.

We have a long way to go, because we still have people in the United States Senate who even deny its existence. And how do you mobilize your government in a democracy when part of your democratic process is gridlocked and frozen and, in some cases, ignorant?

Given your characterization of climate change as a national-security threat, when you look at what the Koch brothers and Exxon Mobil are doing – as you know, Exxon Mobil is being investigated by the New York state attorney general for lying to investors about what it knew about climate change—

FROM LEFT: JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP IMAGES; DAVYDENKO YULIA/SHUTTERSTOCK; CHERYL SENTER/AP IMAGES; NEIL WEBSTER/SHUTTERSTOCK; CARTER COUNTY DETENTION CENTER; LASTRHODESIAN.COM; BALKIS PRESS; SIPA USA/AP IMAGES; NASA, DIGITALLY ALTERED BY "ROLLING STONE"



Absolutely. It's tobacco – it's R.J. Reynolds all over again.

Given what's at stake, do you consider Exxon Mobil or the Koch brothers an enemy of the state?

Well, I'll leave it to other people to assign metaphors or allegories. I would prefer to try to build the consensus necessary, and we don't get there if we start accusing people of things. So we need to try to bring people into an understanding. I don't think we're going to do it with the Koch brothers. But I think that Exxon Mobil stands potentially to lose billions of dollars in what I would imagine would be one of the largest class-action lawsuits in history.

And would you support that?

Yes. I would support the investigation into what happened, and, based on the facts, I'd pursue the facts. You pursue the truth in this kind of a situation. But if indeed they were ignoring internal memos and proselytizing in direct opposition to what they were being advised, there's a certain culpability in that. It would be a very serious thing.

ans weren't taking it very seriously. The actions by Daesh in Ankara, the taking down of the Russian airplane, the attacks in Beirut and now Paris have underscored to a lot of people – hey, guys, we've got to solve Syria. We worked very hard to get the Iranians and the Saudis and the Russians in the same room, and the result was we have a dynamic where everybody has agreed, they want to save Syria as a unified country. They want to save Syria as a secular country. They want to have a Syria that protects all minorities. We set a date for the political process to both begin and to end – January 1st to begin, and six months to define a road map for the future. And everyone agreed that the issue of Assad would be raised within the context of that process. So that's a huge step.

The day after the terrorist attacks, the French began bombing in Syria, and the U.S. went after oil-supply lines. Given your hope for a political solution in Syria, what's the point of immediate retaliation?

Well, no matter what, we have to destroy ISIL. The political track is about Assad, and it is about Syria. ISIL remains

up. But now they've lost an airplane, and they've seen attacks outside the country – I think they know their own limits a little better. And they probably have more interest in trying to resolve this. I hope. It's very hard to be fighting for Assad, supporting Iran and Hezbollah, and then turn around and say to the Sunni world, "Hey, we want a relationship with you."

A few weeks ago, to no one's surprise, you finally rejected the Keystone XL pipeline. There had been a lot of protests and social activism around the pipeline—

I didn't notice it particularly.

All those rallies and protests had no impact on your decision?

I made my decision based on what I thought was the right thing to do. I didn't talk to anybody outside of the department. I didn't call any friend involved in the environmental movement. People I've known for years stayed away from me. Everybody was very careful, appropriately; they left me my space. I just decided I had to do this one on the merits, period.

So what does that say about the importance of environmental activism, then, if

“WE HAVE TO DESTROY ISIL BY TERMINATING ITS ABILITY TO HAVE A CORE, RAISE REVENUE AND ATTRACT PEOPLE. IT ALL CAN END IF WE GET OUR ACT TOGETHER.”

How do you feel as a human being about a company like Exxon Mobil profiting by misrepresenting its knowledge about the damage its product is doing to the planet?

Well, if it turns out to be true, I'd be outraged, furious. I mean, I would be as angry as I was about people selling cigarettes and pretending they don't know it gives them cancer. It's the same thing. It's immoral and incredibly damaging to everybody's global interests. It's a betrayal.

Well, it's pretty clear that they've been subverting the political debate for a long time. And you know this better than anybody.

I do. They have lobbied for their interest. I just don't know if they pushed aside, falsified and turned away from clear information they were given. I've read the articles that say that they did and were, and it has to be investigated. That's appropriate. But I can't draw a final conclusion about it.

Let's talk about Syria. You were on your way to Vienna to talk about a political solution in Syria when the attacks in Paris occurred. How did the attacks change the political dynamic?

Vienna has been a very significant demarcation point. Up until Vienna, we had a nonexistent political track, because Assad wasn't willing to negotiate, and because the Russians and the Irani-

the enemy of everybody. Even the Russians have realized that [destroying ISIL] is not so easy. They don't want to piss off every Sunni country. So the Russians have an incentive to try to work here. And hopefully what happens is we can get a transitional government that can invite countries to come and fight Daesh – and everyone can fight Daesh in a coordinated way. It's a very simple equation.

What does victory over Daesh, or ISIL, look like?

It's like Al Qaeda. You reduce it to a nuisance, where it's not a daily threat. It doesn't have operational capacity in a lot of countries. Its core leadership has been destroyed. It's been reduced in its ability to threaten countries. Obviously, you'll have a few radicals around, but you terminate its ability to have a core, a state, as well as revenue-raising, paying salaries, hiring people, attracting people and giving orders to people. All of that can come to an abrupt end if we get our act together. *Do you feel like that's possible?*

Of course it's possible. Whether it happens or not is up to Iran and Russia.

How did these attacks change your talks, and the dynamic, with Iran and Russia?

It underscores for Russia that this is a mess. Russia thought it could just go in and in two weeks they could clean it all

the largest climate protest action in recent memory had no impact?

Oh, it's very important. I just purposefully didn't pay attention to it. If I'd been a senator, I'd have heard it, or a congressman. But I'm not. I'm not voting; I'm deciding, and I wanted to decide on the basic facts. I knew it was out there and on both sides. But I just didn't pay attention. It was a conscious choice.

Let's talk more about the upcoming climate negotiations in Paris. It's very clear that we're not going to get an agreement that keeps us under the 2C level. And it's not going to be legally binding—

That's OK.

Because of this, you're going to face a lot of skepticism about how effective this deal will be. How will you sell this to the American people as a meaningful agreement?

The reality is when you get 150-plus countries signing on to hit targets, they all have to do something. I mean, they're not going to do nothing, believe me. And 20 of them will make a major impact – the major emitter group – and that's what it takes to get the job done.

But the message to the marketplace will be very significant, and the message to the local leaders and citizens generally will be an awakening, an awareness. Clearly, it is better to do that than nothing. And we're betting on the future

here. We're betting on 2020, we're betting on 2025, 2030, 2050. There's still time within that framework if we do the right things. And I'm betting that technology – some entrepreneur, the next Elon Musk, the next Steve Jobs – somebody's out there who's going to come up with the battery storage or the fusion or whatever it's going to be, a cleaner nuke; I don't know what it's going to be. But so much energy is being concentrated in the context of America's amazing allocation of capital and brilliant innovation that something's going to break out at Berkeley or MIT or wherever the hell it's going to be, and technology, hopefully, will save us on this.

Well, a lot of people would argue that we have all the technology we need, we just don't have the policies to implement it.

Well, we can't force-feed. It's the old "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." People are going to quickly see there's money to be made here. This is the biggest market in the world.

There's a lot of skepticism in general about America's credibility on its emission pledges, based on what Congress is doing to rollback President Obama's Clean Power Plan, as well as other initiatives.

We're already reducing emissions. We've already done more than any other country. We're doing it through our executive orders, and we're doing it through the marketplace, and we're doing it through what cities are doing.

But depending on how things go in the 2016 election, a lot of this stuff could be reversed.

Well, yeah, you're right. There is concern. If I let concern stop me every day, I wouldn't get through the day, right? [Laughs] There was concern we couldn't do a deal with Iran. There was concern we couldn't get chemical weapons out of Syria. There was concern I couldn't get a government out of Afghanistan. We did them all. You can't let concerns stop you; they drive you and they motivate you.

And I'm plenty motivated on this. A lot of people are. And I think that even though it's not, quote, "legally binding" in the targets, countries will be very motivated to live up to their pledges and very motivated to prove they're a serious player. I don't think people want to be embarrassed by going to Paris and then walking away from everything. We're not going to, and I don't think China will either. China has to respond to this, because they've got

a population problem, political problem, quality-of-life [problem]. Their leadership is reacting to a sense of instability in the government.

So they'll deal. It may not happen as fast and as much, but I think the evidence will mount. I think next year's evidence will be more compelling than this year's, and people are going to start pushing faster.



A LIFETIME OF COMMITMENT

Top: Standing alongside President Obama as he announces the termination of the Keystone XL pipeline in November.

Above: Kerry has been actively working to protect the environment since the U.S.'s first Earth Day, in 1970.

So what is your biggest concern going into Paris?

I think [resolving the division between the] developed-and-developing-country piece is important. I think loss and damage will be complicated.

Why is loss and damage, which compensates poor nations for damages from climate impacts, such a tough issue for the U.S.?

We're not against it. We're in favor of framing it in a way that doesn't create a

legal remedy, because Congress will never buy into an agreement that has something like that, after witnessing what happened in Kyoto. If you really want to get something done, don't go down that road. Not rebelling against it in terms of whether we have some responsibility or not – the impact of it would be to kill the deal. And we don't want to do that.

Another thing that clearly won't happen in the Paris summit is any progress in putting a price on carbon pollution, which most economists agree is the most effective tool to cut emissions. Early in the Obama administration, you were a big supporter of cap-and-trade-emissions trading as a mechanism to put a price on carbon. Obviously, that failed. What do you see as the prospects for cap-and-trade in the near future?

Well, you're not going to have cap-and-trade in the U.S. I mean, that got tarnished. It's tragic because other countries have made it work. And, of course, it worked here in the U.S. for sulfur dioxide [a traditional air pollutant from burning fossil fuels]. And we used it to deal with the acid-rain problem. But branding is very powerful in modern politics, and cap-and-trade was negatively branded.

So will we ever get a price on carbon in America?

There are ways of doing it that could be accepted by people, and I think corporations themselves will help step up and make it happen. But for the moment, it's outside my diplomatic bailiwick.

You have said that the decision to confront climate change should be an easy choice, given the many advantages of clean energy. But clearly it is not. You've been involved in this fight to deal with climate change from the beginning. And you know as well as anyone that, by the only yardstick that matters, you have failed. Despite 30 years of talk and climate conferences, global CO₂ levels are not even slowing down – they are just going up and up and up.

Because we're trying to turn around the largest oil tanker ever built.

Human civilization, you mean?

Yeah. And that is a very big challenge. We're taking on traditional economics. We're taking on traditional vested interests. We've made a lot of progress. It's quite extraordinary, frankly, that we've got so much happening right now. The challenge is not whether we'll respond. The question is whether we'll respond fast enough.

Wars Without End

By Brian Hiatt



IT IS A BLEAK TIME FOR THE REPUBLIC. IT IS A PERIOD OF GREAT struggle for the entire planet, and not only is the dark side winning, it's no longer clear any other side even exists. Seriously, you guys – Earth is messed up. Just ask a polar bear, or an almond farmer, or a GOP debate moderator. Or maybe check in with Luke Skywalker. 🤖

“The world is so *horrible*,” says Mark Hamill, Luke’s closest earthly representative, sitting in the shadow of swaying trees in his rather pleasant Malibu yard. At 64, Hamill is older than Alec Guinness was in the first *Star Wars*, and



"It's funny, the idea
that in this reality,
Darth Vader is
real," says Adam
Driver (Kylō Ren).

is in the process of regrowing a distinctly Obi-Wan-ish beard. “Between the Middle East and gun violence and global warming and racism, it’s just *horrible*. And people need this. It’s therapeutic.”

The “this” in question is *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, out on December 18th and directed by geek hero J.J. Abrams, fresh from rebooting the *Star Trek* franchise. It is the seventh *Star Wars* movie, and the first not under the control of the saga’s gnomie creator, George Lucas, who let it all go in 2012, selling Lucasfilm and its franchise to Disney for \$4 billion. *The Force Awakens* will return to the *Star Wars* galaxy three decades after the events of 1983’s *Return of the Jedi*, launching what Disney intends to be an endless series of movies.

Jedi ended with what appeared to be a total defeat for the evil Empire, capped with what Harrison Ford called a “teddy-bear picnic” of dancing Ewoks, complete with smiley Jedi ghosts at the sidelines. The Rebel Alliance might as well have pinned a “Mission Accomplished” banner to a tree on the forest moon of Endor.

“With any movie that ends with going off in the sunset and a celebratory moment, you can ask, ‘Well, what happened the day after?’” says Abrams. “Then decades go past. We were literally asking, ‘Well, what happened to the disbanded Empire? What happened to the Republic?’”

It is perversely comforting to learn that even in that fairy-tale distant galaxy, even with the Force on its heroes’ side, history simply refuses to stop. “Someone’s story doesn’t end with the big triumph,” says screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan, who co-wrote 1980’s *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* with Lucas, and returned to script *The Force Awakens* alongside Abrams (with *The Big Chill* and much more in between). “Life goes on. In those 30 years, a lot of things had happened in my life, so you have to assume that things have happened to these characters – and that was part of the fun of it.”

So, for the first time since Ronald Reagan’s first term, *The Force Awakens* will reunite us with Hamill as Luke, Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia – and Harrison Ford, incredibly enough, as Han Solo. Hamill’s role is a guarded mystery – rumors suggest the part is small, setting up a more essential position in the already-in-production sequel. Returning as well: Chewbacca, with the same guy, seven-foot-plus Peter Mayhew, in the fur suit; C-3PO, played once more by Anthony Daniels; R2-D2; and even relative action-figure obscurities such as Admiral Ackbar, best known for a single line of dialogue (“It’s a trap”) and his resemblance to something you’d find at a raw bar.

The film will also introduce us to a panoply of new characters, creatures and plan-

ets. Chief among them are the two stars, Daisy Ridley and John Boyega, both young British actors. Ridley, a total unknown, plays the desert-planet scavenger Rey, last name as yet undisclosed. (It may mean nothing or everything that she resembles Natalie Portman, who played Luke and Leia’s mom in the prequels.) Boyega, memorable as a teen gang leader in the 2011 cult sci-fi film *Attack the Block*, plays erstwhile stormtrooper Finn, last name also unrevealed – but since Abrams notes that the character was written “without any race in mind,” online speculation that it’s “Cal-rissian” is likely nonsense. Then again, Abrams – who has been known to pick obfuscation over spoilers – claims the same about Rey, which could complicate assumptions that she’s a Skywalker.

Girls star Adam Driver, incongruously, is a major bad guy: the masked Kylo Ren, who’s obsessed with carrying on Darth Vader’s legacy. (Boyega calls him “a Darth Vader fanboy who has, like, extreme mental issues.”) There’s a new, supercute droid, the spherical BB-8 – who was an actual on-set robot and/or puppet, and thus hard to interview.

Everyone involved signed what Hamill calls “this massive, oppressive sword-of-Damocles NDA hanging over my head,” so they can’t say much about the plot without being thrown into the Burbank equivalent of the Sarlacc pit. But there was still plenty to talk about – memories to be probed, mysteries to be solved: Could Abrams recapture the magic that Lucas himself summoned only intermittently in

his three digitized prequels, in between council-meeting scenes and wretched dialogue (“I don’t like sand”)? Did Boyega and Ridley understand they were about to send their lives, if not necessarily their careers, into hyperspace? How did the original trio feel about resuming roles that haunted them for decades? Could a ROLLING STONE writer keep it together while hanging out with human editions of his childhood toys?

To find out, there were pilgrimages to be made to the homes of Hamill and Fisher, wisdom to be sought from Ford. Abrams’ hidden base needed to be invaded. The new stars had to be interrogated. So passage was booked to that wretched hive of scum and villainy, Los Angeles, where the search would begin for signs of humanity, and of the Force itself, within a vast and corporate saga....

IN A SHINY-NEW SCREENING room, J.J. Abrams is addressing his T-shirted, somewhat dorky-looking troops. There are fewer than 60 days left before the release of *The Force Awakens*, and the movie is not quite done. The night before, advance tickets went on sale, just as the first full trailer appeared online. “We broke the Internet last night,” Abrams says, to applause. (He’s barely exaggerating: Demand for tickets took down Fandango.) “We all know, intellectually, that people will be seeing this thing, but it was a weird moment of, like, ‘Holy fuck, it was *here*, and now it’s for everyone!’”

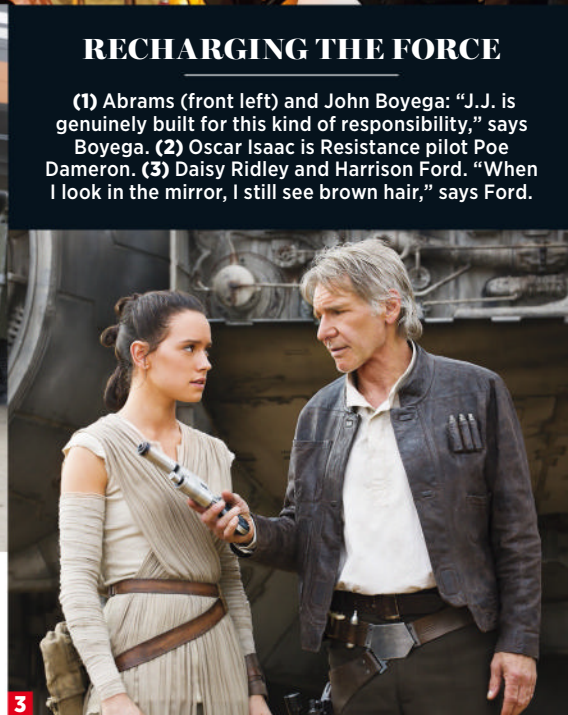
We’re in a recently built addition to the Santa Monica offices of Bad Robot, Abrams’ production company. The main building is a carefully appointed geek fantasia – Abrams’ office alone has the “rabbit’s foot” weapon from his *Mission: Impossible* movie, the alien cube from *Super 8*, and a model of Douglas Fairbanks Jr.’s head from the 1981 film *Ghost Story*. At the moment, Abrams is giving a pep talk to Bad Robot’s visual-effects team, which is finishing the film in conjunction with Lucasfilm’s Industrial Light and Magic, simultaneously at work in multiple time zones.

Abrams is wearing a T-shirt from House Industries, a font company he’s long been obsessed with, along with dark jeans and black leather boots from Blundstone. On his head is a baseball cap from the Santa Monica music store Trutone (he composed the themes for his TV shows *Alias* and *Felicity*); underneath, his thick hair is freshly trimmed at the sides, rising at the top in a rectangle that turns him into a human exclamation point.

“My hair looks even worse when I’m frantic,” Abrams tells me. But despite the stammer-y New York-neurotic affect he takes on when speaking in public, “fran-

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”

Senior writer BRIAN HIATT wrote the Adele cover story in November.



RECHARGING THE FORCE

(1) Abrams (front left) and John Boyega: "J.J. is genuinely built for this kind of responsibility," says Boyega. (2) Oscar Isaac is Resistance pilot Poe Dameron. (3) Daisy Ridley and Harrison Ford. "When I look in the mirror, I still see brown hair," says Ford.

tic" seems to be an alien state for him. The son of two Hollywood producers, he is eerily calm in the face of pressure. "J.J. is genuinely built for this kind of responsibility," says Boyega. Abrams, 49, was born into the dead center of Gen X (he's a Beastie Boys obsessive), but his complete lack of cynicism seems distinctly millennial.

"I've never seen him yell at anybody or lose his cool," says Kathleen Kennedy, president of Lucasfilm, which remains a distinct entity within Disney, like Pixar and Marvel. She was Steven Spielberg's producer for three decades, and Lucas handpicked her to take his place at the top of his company as the Disney sale loomed. "[Abrams] is a fountain of ideas, non-stop. In fact, it usually exhausts everybody else around him. He's endlessly curious, and he wants to try things, and then you finally have to say, 'All right, we're

running out of time, you have to make a decision!'"

Abrams is friends with Jony Ive, the powerful chief designer at Apple, and the talk he's giving his employees would be at home there. "This movie we've been working on for the better part of three years is coming out in the lesser part of two months," Abrams tells them. "And in this final sprint, I just want to say that every little choice, every little detail, every little decision, whether it's something being animated or textured or whatever, all these little things are massively, hugely, crazily important. Don't ever think that extra thing you give to it won't matter.... It probably matters more on this movie than, certainly, anything I will ever be involved in."

Abrams had some reluctance about accepting the *Star Wars* job, not least because he was just finishing his second *Star Trek* film in a row. But Kennedy got him excited with the idea of "a young woman" – Rey, presumably – "who would ask the question 'Who is Luke Skywalker?' It got me thinking, 'Oh, my God, 35 years after *Return of the Jedi* there are young people in that world and what are they up against?' But more importantly, what do they know of the history of the Jedi and the Empire? A young woman was always at the center of the movie. It wasn't a corporate determination that this number of billion dollars should be spent because of what's possible with merchandising and films and animation. Though I'm sure these discussions were held in big rooms at Disney.

"What's been incredible for me has been the creative freedom," he continues, "and the desire to make something hopefully worth people's time – and not a commercial for toys. I'm not itching to be involved in creating things that end up in a landfill. I wanted to tell a story: What would happen if you were 19, 20 years old and you found yourself in a *Star Wars* universe?"

Lucas had written what Kennedy describes as a "brief synopsis" for the sequels, but those ideas were treated as a starting point, at best. Abrams spent eight months or so working on a script with screenwriter Michael Arndt (of *Little Miss Sunshine* fame), with occasional help from Kasdan and Simon Kinberg (of the X-Men franchise). They came away with essentially nothing. Arndt said he would need 18 more months to finish – way more time than Disney or Abrams wanted to spend. "Movies are just like life," says Kasdan, sounding very much like the dude who wrote Yoda's best lines. "They are infinitely complicated and incredibly simple. I think that what had eluded the group was finding the simple spine of the story."

Arndt was out; Kasdan was in. His initial involvement in the saga began under similar circumstances, when a deadline-haunted George Lucas asked him to rapidly rework a weak *Empire Strikes Back* script. This time, Kasdan and Abrams had nine months to write one of the most anticipated movies of all time. "You say, 'Are you a professional or not?'" says Kasdan. For Abrams, having Kasdan aboard removed the possibility of writing "fan fiction": "I didn't have to ask the question 'What would they have done?' Because he was there."

Abrams grew up on Lucas and Spielberg, and there were moments where he couldn't suppress his fandom. "When J.J. first encountered 3PO," says Daniels, "it was like having an enthusiastic schoolboy. It was so good for my ego – and, of course, for 3PO's – to have that energy and joy, and to have somebody in front of you who's got the courage to take on this whole thing."

In the screening room, Abrams is finishing his speech. “The idea that we’re hopefully reigniting the flame of passion toward this thing George Lucas created, it’s very exciting,” he says. “It feels like an honor to me. I’m really grateful for all the work.” They applaud, the lights go down, and a “little reel” from the film begins to play – though not until a visiting journalist is, tragically, removed from the room.

A

FEW DAYS EARLIER, Harrison Ford glances at my twin digital recorders and twists his lips into a very recognizable smirk. “Two of the same?” he asks.

Well, I used three for Springsteen....

“Now you’re making me feel bad,” Ford says, in an equally familiar sardonic tone, settling back in his chair in a Beverly Hills hotel suite. He is a celluloid prism, sitting there, resembling one or another of his characters, depending on the angle. He may well be the best-looking 73-year-old man on this or any planet, his features as sharp as ever, his body ridiculously trim. “I never knew what it was going to be like in my seventies,” he says. “I mean, when I look in the mirror, I still see brown hair.”

His hair is actually silver, almost precisely matched by his crisp metallic-gray shirt, open an extra button at the collar. He maintains eye contact that is mesmerizingly intense, and even Abrams calls him “intimidating.” (“I try not to get in his eyeline,” says Carrie Fisher with a laugh. “Imagine it early in the morning.”) He looks like he could still break your nose with a quick punch. He looks like he would shoot first.

Ford spent years downplaying his attachment to Han Solo, his first starring role after years of scrapping around Hollywood – following two unsuccessful studio contracts in the Sixties and early Seventies, he had started a carpentry career to free him from taking parts he didn’t want. A hard-to-source quote floating around online has him claiming to have “outgrown” Han – but he denies ever saying that. (He did call it a “pretty thin character for me at this point” in 1997.) “And I don’t find any value exploring what I’ve said about this character in the past,” he adds.

He did want Solo dead at the end of *Jedi*. “I didn’t have the imagination to recognize the future potential for the character,” he says. “I was only going to do three of them, so I wanted to use the character to supply some bass notes, some gravitas. I thought to continue to be the wise-cracking cynic was not, perhaps...” He stops himself. “But if they’d done that then, I wouldn’t have this experience, which I think is worthy.” (It could be of some dark significance for Solo’s fate that both Hamill and Fisher mention talking with Rian Johnson, who’s directing the next

Star Wars movie, but Ford says not a word about future films.)

Ford barely started filming before the door of the *Millennium Falcon* – Han Solo’s ship – slammed down on him, pinning him to the floor and badly breaking his leg. “I do see the irony in it,” says Ford. Understandably, it took him a while.

“His ankle went to a 90-degree angle,” recalls Abrams, who fractured a vertebrae trying to lift the door off his star, and spent months concealing his own injury from cast and crew. Production shut down – granting precious time for rewrites – and by the time Ford returned, he was somehow ready to sprint on-camera again. “He was the toughest, most impressive human being,” says Abrams. “If I ever were in a disaster, he’s the only person I know who would be great to have at your side.”

Ford proved that proposition nine months later, when the engine failed in a vintage plane he was piloting. He managed a heroic crash landing on a California golf course, hurting no one except himself – he suffered a broken pelvis and another broken ankle. Ford shakes his head. “To have it happen again? I was just about recovered – I mean, I *was* recovered. I was playing tennis. I came from a great mountain-bike ride. I fell off five times, and I got back on the bike. And then, ‘Look at this beautiful day. Let’s go out in this beautiful, shiny airplane.’ And that flight was really tough.”

Other than a wince when he doubles over laughing, Ford shows zero sign of his injuries. Is he superhuman? “Believe me,” he responds, intensifying the eye contact

to somehow convey months of pain, “I’m not.” He smiles, a little. “But I am somehow extraordinarily lucky, for a guy with shitty luck.”

From the start, Ford had a great deal to do with shaping Han Solo. The costume, for instance, was supposed to come with a goofy Peter Pan collar, “in robin’s-egg blue,” he recalls. “And I said, ‘Is this just pasted on?’ And they said yes. And I said, ‘Take it the fuck off and I’ll deal with it.’” On *The Empire Strikes Back*, he and director Irvin Kershner routinely reworked Kasdan’s dialogue – coming up with the “I know” response to Leia’s “I love you” was just the most prominent example.

“I had been told as a young actor to just shut up and say the lines,” Ford recalls. “But just because you can type this shit doesn’t mean that’s going to be the best expression of it.” (He is paraphrasing something he legendarily told Lucas: “You can type this shit, but you can’t say it.”)

“I had to engage with Harrison in the only way that mattered,” says Abrams. “Which was, ‘This doesn’t feel right, what if we tried this?’ We had scenes that, in all honesty, needed to get figured out sometimes while we were shooting. Sometimes they needed to be rewritten, reshot.”

But Ford gives Abrams substantial credit. “Nine times out of 10, J.J. was dead-on with it,” he says. “You know, it doesn’t feel right in your mouth, and you try a couple of other things, and then you say, ‘You know what? You’re right.’ And ‘Chewie, we’re home’ – an important moment in the story, he notes – “is manifestly better than ‘We’re home, Chewie,’ or a couple of the other options that I tried.”

Ford sees nostalgia the same way Han used to see the Force: For him, it doesn’t exist. So he didn’t get sentimental when he slipped into the costume, even if the sight of him next to Chewbacca had everyone else in awe. But it did make him feel like Han Solo. “Clothes make the man,” he says. “I could have felt silly, to be my age prancing around in high boots and a gun belt with a guy in the hair suit, but I didn’t. I love the work. I like playing different kinds of characters. What’s not to like? It’s no big fucking deal. This is what I do.”

It’s hard not to conclude that Harrison Ford secretly loves shooting blasters and flying a spaceship. “Why wouldn’t he?” asks Hamill. (Then again, there’s the time Ford lost it on *Empire*’s set, taking a handsaw to the *Falcon*’s control panel: “The sound attracted a small crowd of people with their mouths hanging open,” Ford recalls, laughing. “I can’t remember what the deal was, something about wanting to go home.”)

Not long ago, Ford ran into Fisher at a production office. “I went up to hug him,” she says, “and he did a line from the new movie – this one! And I didn’t recognize it right away because it was really organic.” Harrison Ford, quoting *Star Wars*? “Before it’s quotable!”

“

I could have felt silly to be my age prancing in boots and a gun belt with a guy in the hair suit,” says Ford, “but I didn’t. I love the work. This is what I do.

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Fisher, born into showbiz royalty as the daughter of Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, was practically raised on film sets. She saw instantly what Ford had. "He was sitting on the set in the bar – what's that bar called?" She sings a bit of the Cantina jazz. "I thought of Spencer Tracy, Humphrey Bogart – epic. Focus-pulling. I knew I didn't have that. And Mark – not in the same way."

Ford likes to talk about the *Star Wars* saga's "utility" in fans' lives – which is so unromantic it's almost romantic. "It's all I've ever thought about, being useful," Ford says, unleashing the eye contact one last time. "On the set, in the work I do with Conservation International. And in an airplane, it becomes even more simple and compelling. 'What is the task at hand, right this minute?'" He takes a breath – his timing is always perfect. "Even when the engine quits."

BACK AT BAD ROBOT, I am permitted to watch Abrams editing the movie for precisely 20 minutes. That adds up to maybe a minute or two of actual footage. So I can confirm that there is a space battle in the film, featuring X-Wings and TIE fighters and something like a Death Star. There is a lightsaber duel, where Kylo Ren is unmasked, revealing an intense-looking, unscarred Driver. There is a weapon that the filmmakers, at least, refer to as a "Sunsucker." I see a churning energy device on the ground of a planet that sends a massive, lavalike beam upward – Sunsucker or not, it looks scary.

Abrams, fresh from his speech about the importance of details, sits at the center of the editing room, at a computer set-up that allows him to draw with a stylus on images on the big screen in front of him, doodling on his own movie – at one point, he jokingly draws a Coors logo on a snowy mountain. Effects supervisor Roger Guyett and Kennedy are on a conference call from London, watching the footage, and Abrams' scrawls, on their own screens.

They begin by reviewing a shot shown in the trailer, where dozens of flags appear on a castle that belongs to Maz Kanata, a mysterious little goggle-wearing creature, played by Lupita Nyong'o (*12 Years a Slave*) via motion-capture and CGI. The flags are designed to drive superfans nuts with references to the earlier movies, but Abrams tells Guyett that too many of them

allude to the first of Lucas' prequels: "I don't want to be too about podracers," he says. "I'd rather come up with our stuff."

Abrams is most concerned with a couple of segments that intercut between separate action sequences. One includes a "castle battle"; the other pairs a space skirmish led by Oscar Isaac's heroic Poe Dameron with a lightsaber fight where



A LONG TIME AGO

Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford in the original *Star Wars*. "There's a lot to live up to – or down," says Fisher.

Finn and Rey face off with Kylo Ren. "Better late than never, I'm looking at the polarity of the sequences," Abrams says. "It's about not asking the audience to simultaneously be in the most emotionally desperate place – Rey in the forest with Ren – and at the same time to be celebrating. Similarly, in this sequence we have to be careful – we have her in another forest with the same kind of life-and-death despair, while at the same time indicating that things are going well for our pilots."

They go over options to make the space battle look more challenging for the heroes – it all sounds like an awful lot of last-minute work for Guyett and his team. "Do we want to be seeing a TIE fighter taken out?" Abrams asks. "Let's either take an X-Wing out instead or look at eliminating moments that make it look like our guys are too upper hand. Maybe there's a version where the TIE fighter hits an X-Wing and it blows up?" This is all very serious, potentially billion-dollar, business. It also sounds exactly like 11-year-olds negotiating over their toy collections.

Guyett shows Abrams another shot, a close-up of some machinery. "I don't know what I'm looking at," Abrams says calmly. "I knew what I was looking at in the last version." With that, I am ushered out.

SITTING IN A CROWDED Beverly Hills bar, John Boyega is wearing a leather jacket and pants of his own design – black with some straps and zippers on the legs. "It's Michael Jackson-esque," he says, in his tart South London accent. With a hint of Han Solo? "Damn right!"

Finn spends a lot of time in the film with Solo, and Boyega learned a great deal from Ford – he shares his alpha-male confidence, and is already feeling proprietary about his character. "I get very, like, 'Finn wouldn't say that,'" Boyega says. "Finn and Han have a very interesting relationship. Han sees a bit of himself in Finn's bravado, a young guy he can help nurture."

Boyega and Ridley are enjoying what may be their last taste of near-anonymity, and even Driver is about to

get way more famous. But Boyega is oddly comfortable with seeing his face on posters and toy boxes: "I'm surprised as to how my brain is taking it in – like, 'Oh! OK.'"

The experience is more intense for Ridley, who previously had only a few British TV and short film roles. When Abrams told her she had won the part of Rey, her reaction was subdued. "That made me feel better," says Abrams. "Because it wasn't a giddy 22-year-old thrilled to get a starring role. It was someone who understood what it meant to take this on, who realized this was gonna be just as much of a journey for her as it was for the character. We knew whoever played this part needed to be funny, tough, physically capable – but able to break down and be terrified. Literally able to do everything but sing."

Ridley grew up with no particular attachment to *Star Wars*; her family was more into art galleries and the occasional French film. But Driver and Boyega were fans. "My dad had a stormtrooper helmet he would put on and chase us around the house with," says Driver, 32. "The people on the dark side were more interesting to me. You can't beat their aesthetic!"

Boyega was seven when *The Phantom Menace* came out, and he didn't see it until a few years later. He thought it was all right, despite the "green guy jumping around." Instead, video games and comic books inspired him to swing a toy lightsaber around his house: "When I'm wielding a lightsaber, it feels like living out action sequences from my living room."

Ridley, a drama-school grad, spent her first few weeks on the film feeling certain

she would get fired. Then she got comfortable. “Oh, my God, I could’ve shot the film for years, I loved it so much,” she says. “It felt like as I was growing, so was Rey.”

Boyega’s dad is a preacher; his mom works with the disabled. Neither of them has ever seen a *Star Wars* movie. Like Ridley, Boyega attended drama schools and initially dreamed of a life in the West End. He takes pride in his range: Boyega’s *Attack the Block* character, Moses, was far more commanding than the sweaty, panicked initial images of Finn. A friend recently chided Boyega for that: “He was like, ‘Dude, man, they’ve got you running around looking sweaty as hell. Man, I love the way you was in *Attack the Block*.’ I’m like, ‘Dude, you know I’m an actor, right?’ And I’m sorry, if stormtroopers were coming after you, you wouldn’t be chill. You’d be in a desert sweating, panting!”

Ridley, who has a posh West London accent – her father is a photographer who shot the Beatles’ first U.S. tour for *NME*; her mom works for a bank – enjoys the idea of becoming a hero to little girls. Especially, she says, because Rey isn’t royalty like Princess Leia and Queen Amidala. “Rey isn’t born into privilege,” she says. “My cousin’s daughter said something about wanting me to be another princess, and I’m like, ‘No!’ Girls don’t have to be princesses! They can be, you know, scavengers!”

She understands that she may be Rey for life. “People have asked me that as though it’s a bad thing. I’m like, ‘No, I’m cool with that.’ Everyone’s gonna be remembered for one thing. Daniel Radcliffe is gonna be remembered for Harry Potter, even though he’s proved himself time and time again in other roles.”

Boyega isn’t worried about getting stuck in the *Star Wars* universe. He already has other roles coming up, including a part as a Mark Zuckerberg-type CEO in *The Circle*, with Tom Hanks and Emma Watson. “It’s different from the stormtrooper life,” he says, offering a leading-man smile.

Driver, meanwhile, was determined to take the role of Kylo Ren as seriously as anything he’s done. As his castmates recall, that sometimes meant staying in character on set, and even leaving his mask on between scenes. “Do your thing, man,” says Boyega, who is less Method in his approach. “I mean, for me, I follow what Laurence Olivier or someone said: ‘Just act.’ But it was great to see him go for his process. It was intense.”

The goal, says Driver, was “to forget you’re in *Star Wars* and treat it like any other job that’s filled with moments and problems.” Such as delivering a speech to Darth Vader’s melted mask: “When someone sets the scene for you, it’s always very funny. The idea that in this reality, Darth Vader is real.” And now, one of the most promising actors of his generation has a large supply of dolls of himself. “I’m set for

Christmas presents for the next 10 years,” Driver says.

While the others plunge on with their careers, Ridley is planning to study psychology at university, a break she hopes will help keep her grounded in the face of sudden intergalactic fame. “I think I’ll be OK,” she says. She goes silent, then repeats herself. “I don’t know. I think I’ll be OK!”

ON THE FRONT OF MARK Hamill’s black T-shirt is a feral-looking, sharp-toothed drawing of a Mickey Mouse-like creature. Hamill is too good-natured for this to be a subtle protest (and it turns out to be a character created by his son Nathan). But he has been chastised by Disney at least once lately. He told a reporter that fans who expect *The Force Awakens* to be “the Second Coming” would inevitably be let down, resulting in the headline MARK HAMILL SAYS STAR WARS FANBOYS ARE ‘BOUND TO BE DISAPPOINTED.’ “That got me a phone call from the powers that be,” he says, laughing.

He also told a comic-con audience something it didn’t want to hear. “The phrase that I used in front of, like, 5,000 *Star Wars* fans pumped to the gills, ready to see the trailer, was ‘It’s only a movie,’” he says, cackling now. “It’s unfortunate because I heard it from George first, OK, on the set! I was trying to appeal to the rational, sane people who know movies don’t really change your life, and if you really think we can make you feel like you’re 10 years

old at 38, you know what’s gonna happen. So just don’t think that and you’ll be fine!”

Hamill lives with Marilou, his wife of more than 30 years, in a relatively modest house set on a fairy-tale-beautiful property. The front room is splashed with light, with decor that is more *Little House on the Prairie* than *Death Star*. There are floral couches, blond-wood floors, a pre-Raphaelite painting of cherub-esque women on a pastoral yard, a bust of Mozart (Hamill played him in a stage production of *Ama-deus*), a cabinet filled with decorative plates. On an end table in the corner, nestled among family photos (the couple have three kids), is a well-known shot of Hamill in an X-Wing fighter uniform circa 1980, hugging a pregnant Marilou. Halloween decorations are everywhere – Hamill is really into Halloween.

Pretty as he was in the original trilogy, Hamill was never fated to be a movie star. “He couldn’t have been,” says Fisher, bluntly. “What, 10 people get to be movie stars per generation? But people can still have substantial careers.” It’s easier to see why now. Hamill is charismatic, but charmingly eccentric, more like the president of a *Star Wars* fan club than one of its stars. He’s thrown on an open short-sleeved button-down with a USC logo over the T-shirt, and he’s wearing black jeans and Batman-themed Converse sneakers – one of them has green laces, the other purple. His dirty-blond hair is shaved around the ears for his villain role on the CW’s *The Flash*.

In the Eighties, Hamill would wonder aloud why he wasn’t getting more film roles. But he’s grown comfortable with his eclectic career, especially after becoming a top voice-over artist, most famously as the Joker in years of much-loved Batman cartoons. “I got into a niche where I did voice-overs and I could do theater when I wanted,” says Hamill. “I’ve been having a great time, doing interesting stuff. It’s just that people don’t really pay a lot of attention.”

But he’d need more than his voice to play Luke Skywalker again. So Hamill, now 64, has spent the past couple of years on what seems to be a brutal training regimen, this time with Yoda only figuratively on his back. He seems to have lost a good 50 pounds, but he doesn’t want compliments: “It implies that I looked so dreadful before!” “Look at what I’m eating now instead of potato chips and bagels,” he adds, gesturing to a fruit-and-vegetable plate. “I’m on the ‘if it tastes good, don’t eat it’ diet.”

Hamill and Fisher were among the first to learn that Lucas was planning to sell Lucasfilm, and that there would be more movies. (Lucas actually informed Hamill decades ago that he would be needed as a sixtysomething Luke, but then told him much later that there would be no sequels.) Back in 1983, Hamill was sad about the saga ending just as Luke became a real Jedi: “I had just gotten to be what I wanted to be – and that’s the end of the story?”

“
Fisher says
she’s never
stopped being
Princess Leia:
“I’ve always
been in ‘Star
Wars.’ I am
eternally in
‘Star Wars.’
But hopefully
now they’ll
pay me again!”



SPACE JAM

Abrams: "Every little detail, whether it's animated or textured, is important."

But his first reaction to Lucas' news, delivered at a lunch during a *Star Wars* convention, was to enter a "state of shock." He realized he had mixed feelings. "We're all in a great place and we've all done it before," he says. "There was a beginning, middle and end. You have to think about all the aspects, 'cause if you wanna maintain a low profile, this isn't the best way to do it!" He found himself hoping that Ford wouldn't do it. "I said, 'The ace in the hole is, Harrison's not gonna do this. Why would he?' So that's our escape clause. You know, if I'm the only one, I'll look terrible – but if *he* doesn't do it, I don't have to do it."

On set, it was different. When Hamill walked onto the *Millennium Falcon* – and he emphasizes that he did this as himself, not as Luke – he was overwhelmed. "It was opening up all these little windows in your memory banks," he says. "How it felt to be sitting in it or just the smell of it all or where Chewie was playing chess. So you laugh a lot. I mean, you just can't believe that this is happening. It just doesn't seem real."

Alone among the original cast, Hamill is a genuine comic-book and sci-fi superfan, as well as a Sixties-rock aficionado. "I understand obsessive-compulsive entertainment interests," he says. "I have many, many, many of them." In the back corner of his house is an impressive man cave, filled with nearly as many pop-culture treasures as the Bad Robot offices: a huge collection of hardcover omnibuses of old DC Comics issues; vintage Aurora models; Beatles books; a 3D lenticular poster for the 1954 movie *Gorilla at Large*; cels from his Batman cartoons; an illuminated 3D Martin and Lewis poster. A treadmill faces the huge TV.

As I head to my car, Hamill sticks his head out from a window, to say, or rather, yell, goodbye again. I mention that I'm headed to Fisher's house the next day. "You're gonna have the time of your life," he says. "Fasten your seat belt!"

PRINCESS LEIA HAS A cold. Or so she thinks: Later in the week, she will learn she actually has pneumonia. In any case, Carrie Fisher has decided to do some of her interview while lying in bed, with a quilt pulled nearly up to her neck. No matter. "I have a great bedroom," she says, correctly. The upholstered headboard behind her, set against a pinkish-purple wall, has a stained-glass panel built into it; it's also brocaded with seashells, a tiny doll hand and little cards with printed messages ("I know why I was in the hospital," one reads); a projector lights up one corner with butterflies; there's a bird made of tiny lightbulbs in another; a rug displays a colorful starscape; video art on a flatscreen shows a forest scene.

The whole house, a Beverly Hills mansion built in 1919, shares that magical-mystery-tour vibe: In a chair on top of the roof is a life-size human figure in a suit, with a bear's head; on the porch, among many other artifacts, is a gigantic Princess Leia doll inside an old-fashioned phone

booth. There's a Christmas tree in the living room, year-round; one of the ornaments is her cinematic daddy, Darth Vader.

"I transcend whimsy," Fisher says. So she's reached the next level? She nods, deadpanning, "LSD." In recent years, Fisher has been frank about undergoing repeated shock treatments after a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. She's a prolific and hilarious novelist and memoirist, and she treats this subject with the light touch she applies to everything; a sign on the gate to her property reads *ASK ME ABOUT MEDICATION SIDE EFFECTS*, and there's a lurid poster for an old electroshock-themed film in one room.

Hamill recalls that when Lucas told him and Fisher about the new movies, she said "I'll do it!" within seconds. Her only question was whether there might be a role "for Billie" – meaning not Billy Dee Williams, who will presumably pop up at some point, but her 23-year-old daughter, Billie Lourd, currently on *Scream Queens* (who did end up winning an undisclosed *Star Wars* role).

"I've *always* been in *Star Wars*," Fisher says. "I've never *not* been in *Star Wars*!" She laughs. "But hopefully now they'll pay me again!" So the news from Lucas "was surprisingly not surprising."

She is proprietary about Leia, touting her as a "huge" feminist icon and bristling at the suggestion that she was ever a "damsel in distress." "She bossed them around," she says. "I don't know what your idea of distress is, but that wasn't it! And I wasn't some babe running through the galaxy with my tits bouncing around. So I wasn't threatening to women."

She's wearing a black housedress; her feet are bare. Her hair is [Cont. on 66]

THE TURNING POINT

EVERY FOUR YEARS
the contending political parties
describe the impending presidential
election as a great historic event, and
once in a while it is true. The 2016
election looms as one of the most
pivotal moments of our time.

— BY SEAN WILENTZ —

MORE THAN 150 YEARS AGO, IN 1858, AS THE NATIONAL CRISIS OVER SLAVERY HEIGHTENED, Abraham Lincoln famously remarked that “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” and that the “crisis” would be “reached and passed” only when the house divided would “become all one thing or all the other.” Now, the long conflict over social equality, political democracy and American government that began during the Progressive era, followed by the New Deal and the Great Society, is reaching its inescapable conclusion. If the Republicans win the presidency in 2016, they will also almost inevitably control both the Senate and the House of Representatives, giving them virtually unfettered command over the entire federal government to go along with their domination of the great majority of the state governments. The Republican president could easily be in a position to appoint new justices to the Supreme Court for an unstoppable right-wing majority that would last

for a generation to come. *Bush v. Gore*, *Citizens United* and *Shelby County v. Holder* (the 2013 ruling that greatly weakened the 1965 Voting Rights Act) would be merely the prelude to tilting political and social power. If, however, the Democrats win the presidency in 2016, they will almost certainly take back the Senate and make gains in the House – and the Democratic president will likely be able to appoint new justices to the Supreme Court that will eventually comprise a liberal majority. Between these two stark alternatives, there is no middle ground. In 2016, the country will become either one thing or the other.

HOW DID WE ARRIVE AT THIS DECISIVE MOMENT? TWO powerful historic developments have driven American politics over the past half century. The Republican Party has been transformed by a conservative movement that has pushed it ever further to the right. The Democratic Party, stunned by the conservative counterrevolution, has struggled to reinvent itself and its politics, while facing the increasingly formidable resources of the right. These shifts are responsible for the polarization and dysfunction that have gripped American government since the 1990s. But they began in 1968.

Amid that year's turmoil, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy crushed liberal hopes and paved the way for the election of Richard M. Nixon. Although at the time Nixon seemed to represent a moderating force inside the Republican Party, his triumph, in retrospect, set in motion what has proved to be the Republicans' unending radicalization.

It is easy to forget how much Nixon changed American politics. Only four years before 1968, Lyndon B. Johnson won a landslide victory over the hard-right Republican Barry Goldwater and swept a liberal majority into Congress. Goldwater attracted to his cause extremist elements that arose out of probusiness reaction to the New Deal and out of the right-wing anti-communism of the Cold War. After World War II, those elements began uniting traditional conservatives and libertarians, embodied in fringe groups like the John Birch Society. Goldwater also courted and won the white segregationist vote in the South, another major element in the emerging conservative coalition, inflamed by the rise of the civil rights movement and the fallout from the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Johnson, in routing Goldwater, wanted to outdo the achievements of his idol, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and create nothing less than a Great Society. He would complete the unfinished business of the New Deal on everything from health care reform to environmental conservation while also waging what he called “unconditional war on poverty in America.” LBJ embraced civil rights and joined the fight for economic justice with the one for racial equality – claiming the mantle of Lincoln just as the Republican Party was rejecting its historical legacy and embracing a Southern strategy that would transform it into the party it is today.

Johnson's continued, forceful pursuit of civil rights policies not only destroyed the Democrats' age-old political base in the South, it also alienated white urban ethnic voters in the North and contributed to a severe backlash that brought large Republican gains in the 1966 midterm elections. Then, LBJ's escalating

military intervention in the Vietnam War badly split his party and ruined his presidency. For a brief hopeful moment, it seemed as if the Democratic challenger Robert Kennedy might reunite the liberal base that would enable him to succeed Johnson. But Kennedy's assassination ended that possibility.

Nixon, far from a favorite of the Goldwater wing of the GOP, was deeply suspect on the right, and his administration in several ways followed what had become a post-New

Deal consensus on domestic affairs, especially on economic policy. But Nixon also tried to reverse the 1960s, the reforms of John F. Kennedy and Johnson, with his inflammatory coded racial appeals and his efforts to slow the course of desegregation. He launched a right-wing culture war, in which Republicans attacked Democrats as the party of “acid, amnesty and abortion,” and called critics “an effete corps of impudent snobs” – a phrase voiced by the White House's main spokesman for the morally upstanding “silent majority,” Vice President Spiro Agnew. “This country is going so far to the right you won't recognize it,” Nixon's attorney general and political counselor John N. Mitchell bragged.

Nixon's downfall – his humiliating resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal – did not, however, bring about a resurgence of the GOP's once-formidable moderate wing, personified by figures like New York Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller. The migration of the conservative white South from the Democrats to the Republicans, coupled with Nixon's appeals to the

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racial and cultural resentments of “Middle Americans,” had moved the political center of gravity inside the GOP sharply to the right. The chief beneficiaries of Watergate inside the GOP turned out to be the party’s hard-right wing, which had never trusted the wily Nixon – and now rallied behind its new darling, former California Gov. Ronald Reagan.

In 1976, Reagan challenged and very nearly defeated Nixon’s White House successor, the traditional center-right Midwesterner Gerald R. Ford, for the Republican presidential nomination. Four years later, with additional help from newly politicized white Southern evangelical Christians, Reagan humiliated his chief party opponent, the transplanted Yankee George H.W. Bush of Texas. Then, after he opened his general-election campaign with an appeal to states’ rights in the heart of racist Mississippi – Neshoba County, where the Ku Klux Klan had murdered three civil rights workers in 1964 – Reagan handily defeated the idealistic but ineffectual Democratic incumbent (and pro-civil rights Southerner) Jimmy Carter.

Reagan’s triumph was a decisive victory for the right wing of the GOP that had seemingly been disgraced in 1964, and it marked a direct repudiation of New Deal and Great Society liberalism. Central to Reagan’s program was the reformulation of old-time laissez-faire dogma as something supposedly shiny and new – “supply-side economics,” which claimed that skewing fiscal policy heavily toward the wealthy, in the form of huge tax cuts, would supposedly trickle down economic growth to the benefit of all. With the help of a new “counter-establishment” of corporate-funded conservative-policy think tanks like the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation, this radical regression to the doctrines of the Calvin Coolidge era that helped precipitate the Great Depression quickly became a fundamental Republican article of faith. To this, the Reagan Republicans added a souped-up culture war, reinforced by the militant soldiers of the Christian right led most prominently by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, an old segregationist, and his so-called Moral Majority.

Reagan’s two terms as president deepened the radicalization of the Republican Party. Yet moderate-establishment elements still commanded enough political leverage in 1980 for Reagan to name the defeated Bush as his running mate. As president, Reagan often spoke as an ideologue but occasionally governed as a pragmatist, whether it came to raising taxes (11 times) or to pursuing nuclear-arms agreements with the Soviets (to the outrage of many of his neoconservative cadres). On some issues, notably immigration reform, Reagan’s positions were so liberal that in later years they would come to be regarded as perfidy.

Reaganism, for all of its genuine ideological fervor, contained an element of bad faith. Even as the Reagan White House implemented regressive policies, cutting social spending (especially for the poor), resisting progress in civil rights and rolling back progressive tax rates, it always promised its

Princeton historian SEAN WILENTZ wrote about George W. Bush in the 2006 story “The Worst President in History?”

political base more than it could or even intended to deliver. Under Reagan, the gross federal debt tripled from \$900 billion to \$2.7 trillion, and the size of government grew by 6.5 percent. Signature programs from the New Deal and the Great Society, such as Social Security and Medicare, were expanded. (Reagan had often criticized Social Security, but in 1983, when he signed legislation to preserve the system, he said it demonstrated “for all time our nation’s ironclad commitment to Social Security.”) Appealing to his battalions from the Christian right, Reagan paid lip service to crusades like overturning *Roe v. Wade*, but in the words of one right-wing activist, his White House “offered us a bunch of political trinkets.”

Further aggravating conservatives, Vice President Bush ran as Reagan’s successor in 1988. At heart, Bush remained an old-school patrician Republican. His pledge, in his nomination acceptance speech, never to raise taxes won him an ovation – “Read my lips: no new taxes” – but his promise, in that same speech, to seek “a kinder, gentler nation” left conservatives cold.

Bush showed his true colors as president in 1990 when, addressing the fiscal mess he inherited from Reagan, he approved a budget deal that broke his “no new taxes” promise. The decision branded Bush, to the hard-liners, as a fraud. Inside Congress, a younger generation of conservatives, led by the firebrand Newt Gingrich from Georgia, engineered a revolt within the party against Bush, the betrayer.

While Gingrich plotted, the job of bloodying Bush’s nose in the 1992 Republican primaries fell to Patrick J. Buchanan, an old Nixon hand and so-called paleo (or Stone Age) conservative. By pressing the wedge issues of the culture war, Buchanan advanced the party’s radicalization. Hoping to appease the insatiable base, Bush’s forces overcompensated by giving Buchanan the prime-time speaking slot on the nominating convention’s opening night, and Buchanan rose to the occasion by delivering a rip-roaring attack on Democrats as the party of radical feminists and militant homosexuals, out to destroy what was left of American decency. “There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America,” Buchanan declared. “It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself.” The face of the Republican Party seemed to be morphing from Reagan’s genial optimism to Buchanan’s fury; and the culture warriors whom the leaders had been riling up for decades now seemed primed to turn the GOP into “God’s Own Party.”

After the debacle of 1968, the National Democratic Party fragmented, leaving anti-war liberals, old-style New Dealers and even surviving elements of the old Jim Crow Southern wing of the party to jockey for internal power. In the aftermath of Robert Kennedy’s assassination, Kennedy’s Senate friend George McGovern became, briefly, a rallying point for RFK’s traumatized followers. Four years later, McGovern won the Democratic nomination on a forthright anti-

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Vietnam War platform and ran a disastrous campaign, only to be crushed by the incumbent Nixon in one of the greatest electoral landslides in U.S. history. The Watergate scandal led to an uptick in Democratic fortunes in the 1974 midterm elections, and in 1976, the Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter narrowly won the presidency. As a so-called New Southerner, Carter benefited from Nixon's resignation but succeeded in large measure by winning the votes of Southern blacks newly enfranchised by the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s.

For the moment, Democrats convinced themselves that the Nixon presidency had been an aberration, and that Carter's election, no matter his slight margin of victory, marked a resumption of the forward march of liberalism that had become bogged down under Johnson. "The hands that picked cotton," the civil rights leader Andrew Young later remarked, "finally picked the president." And as president, Carter, building on the lessons he took from the Vietnam disaster, appealed to principles of human rights and sought to redirect the conduct of foreign policy away from reflexive and sometimes morally compromising Cold War realpolitik.

Caught between the president's ideals and the harsh realities of international affairs, and buffeted by recurring oil and energy crises at home, the Carter White House seemed overwhelmed. Some of the party's liberals supported the surviving Kennedy brother, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, in his challenge to Carter's renomination in 1980, resulting in a primary battle that proved divisive, destructive and demoralizing. Other Democrats, like Carter's vice president, Walter Mondale (the party's presidential nominee in 1984), stayed true to the old New Deal and Great Society verities, which were deflected by the conservative charmer Reagan.

Progressives outside of electoral politics also faced enormous obstacles. Although the cultural fallout of the civil rights, women's and gay-rights movements was quietly and steadily transforming the ways many Americans lived, the conservative ascendancy put those movements on the defensive, from chagrin about the failed effort to ratify an Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s to outrage at Reagan's indifference to the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.

Finally, Bill Clinton broke through in 1992 when, with a lingering recession crowding out the culture wars in the general election, he defeated the damaged Bush, who seemed befuddled in dealing with the economy. Having risen through Arkansas politics during the post-civil rights years, Clinton championed the egalitarianism of the 1960s but also understood the recent history that had hurt the party so badly. It was not simply that the cultural distempers of race and religion had pushed many voters over to the Republicans. On the issues of economic equality and opportunity, many erstwhile white Democrats believed the party had abandoned them. Clinton would try to reconstruct liberal politics (albeit without using the by-now-demonized word "liberal") by directing his reformism to the middle class and aspiring middle class. He campaigned on a detailed platform of economic and social policies under the slogan "Putting People First."

As with Carter before him, Clinton's Southern background looked to some party professionals like an antidote to the image of Democrats as decadent, Northern, tax-and-spend do-gooders. But Clinton's thinking ran much deeper than that. In a major speech in 1991, Clinton assailed what he called the glorification of "the pursuit of greed and self-interest" during the Reagan years, even as poverty rates grew for women "and their little children." He had it in mind to enact major social legislation, including passing comprehensive health care reform, a goal that had eluded Democratic presidents since Harry Truman. Yet Clinton also endorsed

reducing the size of the federal bureaucracy as well as an overhaul of the welfare system geared toward job training.

Clinton's efforts to update liberalism predictably upset some entrenched constituencies inside the Democratic Party. But if some on the left had reservations about Clinton, Republicans understood just how threatening his revised liberalism was to their political prospects. Some on the right, astonished that any Democrat could win the White House in the wake of Reagan, denounced Clinton as illegitimate. Others mobilized furiously to defeat Clinton's health care reform plan. "Any Republican urge to negotiate a 'least bad' compromise with the Democrats, and thereby gain momentary public credit for helping the president 'do something' about health care, should be resisted," the conservative operative William Kristol wrote in a memo to Republican leaders. Destroying Clinton's proposal root-and-branch had become the imperative. The right-wing mobilization included, among other things, an effective insurance-industry lobbying campaign of misleading television ads, the notorious "Harry and Louise" spots, which demonized "government bureaucrats" and distorted public debate.

White House blunders in presenting its health care plan plagued its efforts – and when the proposal was abandoned before even coming to a congressional vote, Republicans made the most of the situation. Advancing his strategy to destroy the existing order, House Minority Whip Gingrich nationalized the 1994 midterms, recruiting a crop of reliably right-wing candidates for the House and rallying them behind what he called the Contract With America, a set of proposals crafted by the pollster Frank Luntz. Republicans were also schooled with a Luntz-written memo that encouraged them to "speak like Newt" and trash liberal Democrats with defamatory words like "radical," "sick," "pathetic," "decay" and "traitors."

In November, the rapidly rightward-trending Republicans picked up 54 House seats, which gave them majority control for the first time in 40 years. Gingrich was now speaker. President Clinton, stunned, was reduced to reminding the nation of the presidency's continued relevance. Yet the Republican triumph, by accelerating the party's radicalization, also carried the elements of Gingrich's downfall four years later.

THE PRESS QUICKLY PRONOUNCED Gingrich the guru master of Washington, and the new speaker relished it. "I think I am a transformational figure," he boasted to one reporter on the eve of the 1994 elections. "I'm a much tougher partisan than they've seen... much more willing to take risks to get it done." Yet for all of his verbal bravado and tactical skills, Gingrich would soon be overmatched in his battles with Clinton.

Clinton responded to the trouncing strategically, by practicing "triangulation," which many critics denigrated but was ordinarily known as politics. Following the defeat of many conservative and moderate Democrats in the 1994 debacle, the congressional Democrats were now, as a group in the minority, more liberal than they had been. Clinton saw room to move in the middle. In June 1995, he laid out a budget proposal that seized the mantle of fiscal responsibility, which the GOP had claimed for its own. Many liberals reacted with horror and reflexively denounced the president as a defector, a "me-too" Democrat, and worse. They failed to notice that Clinton's supposedly defeatist budget held the line on education investments and Medicare, which the Republicans wanted to throttle, while aiming tax cuts at the middle class and not the wealthy.

While Clinton bobbed and weaved, the Republicans began to look disturbingly extreme. Swirling around the new majority were freshly emboldened, virulent, even apocalyptic strains of extremist right-wing politics, reminiscent of the fiercest fringe elements that had backed the Goldwater campaign 30 years earlier. Push came to shove in Washington in late 1995, when Clinton twice refused to approve a devastating Republican budget that, among other things, would have eviscerated Medicare and granted the wealthy large capital-gains tax cuts, and the Republicans twice shut down the federal government. In standing his ground, Clinton was making two gambles: that no matter how much the public griped about "big government," people still favored the numerous federal services they received every day; and that blame for the standstill would fall on the bombastic, anti-government Republicans in Congress. Clinton won both wagers when, as the second shutdown was headed into its fourth week, the humbled Republicans backed down.

Republicans were dismayed following Clinton's trouncing of the establishment candidate Sen. Robert Dole in the 1996 election. Their frustration would grow as it became clear that the nation had recovered from the sluggish economic times of 1990-92 and entered a sustained and roaring boom period – one that, in time, would surpass the prosperity of the Reagan years. But in light of Clinton's success, the congressional GOP radicals, their numbers swelled by the newcomers elected in 1994, concluded not that they had overreached with their shutdown and other obstructionist tactics but that their leaders had betrayed them. Speaker Gingrich became the chief target, especially when, chastened by the shutdown and Clinton's re-election, he and Trent Lott, the Senate majority leader, reached an amicable accord with the White House over the 1997 budget.

In July 1997, a plot involving fed-up, high-ranking House Republicans, masterminded by party whip Tom DeLay (a former exterminator who called the Environmental Protection Agency "the Gestapo") and which included Majority Leader Dick Armey (who called First Lady Hillary Clinton "a Marxist") and conference chairman John Boehner (who passed out checks from the tobacco lobby to congressmen on the floor of the House), plotted Gingrich's ouster.

While Gingrich floundered, anti-Clinton forces on the right seized on a long-standing special-prosecutor investigation that had produced nothing but insinuations and false but damaging headlines about a failed real estate investment in Arkansas in the 1970s called Whitewater. Then, early in 1998, a tightknit group of right-wing lawyers and operatives got wind of Clinton's sexual encounters with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and worked hand-in-glove with special prosecutor Kenneth Starr to try to shift the focus of his investigation to bring Clinton down. Riding the media frenzy, and hoping to shore up support on his right, Gingrich excoriated the president and made the scandal the central issue in the midterm elections. (Left unreported by the press, but well known to Washington insiders, was the inconvenient fact that Gingrich was himself conducting an illicit affair with a woman who was young enough to be his daughter and who was on the congressional payroll.)

In October, the month after Starr presented an impeachment referral to the House, Gingrich assured the Republican caucus that their party would pick up, at a minimum, six to 30 seats. Evidently, neither Gingrich nor virtually anyone else in Washington had noticed that the public, although disapproving of Clinton's private behavior, approved of his presidency: Throughout the months of turmoil, Clinton's favorability rating in the opinion polls had never fallen below 60 percent.

When the Democrats actually gained five seats in the House and held their own in the Senate, Gingrich was finished. Days after the election, amid acrid recriminations, he resigned not simply the speakership but also his seat in Congress. Actual power in the Republican caucus immediately shifted to Gingrich's right-wing rival DeLay, who declared that Clinton was unfit for his office because he lacked the correct "biblical worldview." With DeLay as the driving force, the House Republicans ignored the judgment of the electorate and went ahead with Clinton's impeachment, only to result in the Senate, as expected, acquitting the president.

The rise and fall of Gingrich extended and strengthened what had become a spiraling, radicalizing pattern inside the Republican Party since 1980. First, a new conservative Republican leadership would promise to crush big government and the enemies of traditional morality and culture. Then, those leaders would prove, at best, inadequate to the task or, worse, would wind up being (like President George H.W. Bush) turncoats. Even more dogmatic and confrontational Republicans would take the disgraced leaders' place, further purging the dwindling ranks of GOP moderates and inflaming the angry Republican base – and when they could not deliver on their promises, the new leaders would fall disgraced, opening the way for yet another cycle of radicalization.

CLINTON HAD NOT JUST OUTLASTED Gingrich and the Republicans – he had triumphed. He would leave office with an exceptional approval rating of 66 percent. Yet during the presidential campaign in 2000, Clinton's anointed successor, Vice President Al Gore, wary about Clinton's reputation

after the Lewinsky scandal, distanced himself from the administration and its achievements. The consumer-rights advocate and gadfly Ralph Nader's third-party effort played upon all the misgivings on the left by claiming that there was no real difference between the Republicans and the Democrats, and drained a small but vital portion of the Democratic vote.

Yet uncertain as the Democrats' coalition was, they lost the presidential election of 2000 only when the conservative-dominated Supreme Court elevated George W. Bush to the White House by a single vote, five to four – an event that, in its audacity, affirmed the radicalizing pattern on the right. (Gore, who won the popular vote by a half-million, might well have won the vote of the contested state of Florida if the court had permitted it to be fully counted.)

Bush undertook the presidency on intensely partisan terms congenial to the party's base, and by early September 2001, his approval ratings had slipped to a bare majority, 51 percent. Suddenly, though, the terrorist attacks of September 11th revived Bush's White House. Bush's image as a warrior president, especially after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, sustained him through his re-election in 2004. A chorus of Republicans conducted by Karl Rove, Bush's chief political operative, crowed about a permanent GOP electoral majority, in what Rove called a "rolling realignment." In the neoconservative *Weekly Standard*, the pundit Fred Barnes expressed as a matter of irrefutable conventional wisdom that "Republican hegemony in America is now expected to last for years, maybe decades."

All along, the administration found willing allies in the Republican Congress and among right-wing advocacy groups, not simply in pursuing a hard-right agenda on fiscal policy but also in subordinating the domestic agenda to political considerations. Even before the September 11th attacks, the Bush team was closely working with a lobbyist political ma-

chine known as the K Street Project, which was run by House Majority Whip DeLay and bent on a partisan politicization of the federal government. "There is no precedent in any modern White House for what is going on in this one," one appalled senior appointee told a reporter after leaving his job in August 2001.

In 2004, the Democratic nomination went to Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry – a hero of the Vietnam War who became a leader of the anti-war movement. Kerry, though, failed to respond quickly to underhanded attacks on his war record and his character. Then, Rove stage-managed referendums in 11 key states to ban gay marriage, which whipped up the right-wing base. Bush squeaked by to win re-election, and the GOP increased its majorities in the House and the Senate.

In its second term, though, the Bush presidency unraveled quickly. The war in Iraq went poorly, despite the premature announcement of *MISSION ACCOMPLISHED*. And in the wake of its bungled response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the administration and the Republican Congress reeled from one disaster to another. These included the exposure of a web of scandals involving a GOP lobbyist, Jack Abramoff, which soon tainted top Republicans, including DeLay, who was now the House majority leader. The midterm elections in 2006 handed the Democrats a 31-vote majority in the House and a one-vote majority in the Senate.

In 2006, a growing number of economists began warning that the nation's prosperity had become much too dependent

THE ELECTION OF THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN to the White House heralded a major landmark in the civil rights revolution and, some imagined, a cessation of the culture wars that had raged since the 1960s. Obama appeared to affirm the dawn of a new liberal political era. The enlarged Democratic majority

in the House was nearly identical to the one that greeted Clinton, and the Democratic majority in the Senate was substantial.

As it happened, though, Obama was unprepared for what lay in store. A relative newcomer to Washington, he had campaigned as something of an outsider, promising to end partisan gridlock by finding common ground across party lines. He thought he would be a post-partisan president, convinced that, as he had declared at the 2004 Democratic convention, there is "not a liberal America and a conservative America – there's the United States of America." Yet on the very night of his swearing in, as if mocking Obama's naiveté, a band of Republican congressional leaders of the post-Gingrich cohort met for several hours at a D.C. steakhouse, joined by the original revolutionary Newt Gingrich, to plot Obama's downfall. The first step would be to stop cold the new president's agenda in Congress. "We've gotta challenge them on every single bill and challenge them on every single campaign," said Congressman Kevin McCarthy, as reported by the journalist Robert Draper. Uncompromising as they were, though, even these latest GOP hotspurs did not foresee just how fiercely doc-

On the night of Obama's swearing in, Republican congressional leaders met at a D.C. steakhouse to plot his downfall. "We've gotta challenge them on every bill," said Congressman Kevin McCarthy.

on an irrationally inflated real estate market. The bubble soon burst, and by August 2007, the markets were facing a crisis point: So-called subprime mortgages were dragging down the credit markets, and hedge funds along with them. In January 2008, after a week of heavy losses on Wall Street, President Bush announced an economic stimulus package consisting of tax incentives and rebates – and stock prices continued to fall. The Federal Reserve Board made emergency cuts in interest rates, but the crisis deepened over the summer.

Suddenly, in mid-September, the Lehman Brothers investment bank, one of the most prestigious firms on Wall Street, filed for bankruptcy, and Merrill Lynch and the huge AIG insurance firm announced that they, too, were about to go under. On October 3rd, after weeks of contentious debate, Congress, with a strong push from the White House, approved a \$700 billion bill to bail out the nation's financial system and prevent a catastrophic economic collapse.

The political fallout from the bailout was immediate. Once again, Republican leaders had failed their base miserably. The Democrats would elect Barack Obama to the White House, with an ambitious liberal agenda, and they also substantially enlarged their majorities in the House and Senate. President Bush was departing office deeply unpopular, even on the right. Some pundits wondered whether a new progressive liberal majority had sent the Republican Party into a long-term decline. Those predictions, though, proved misguided. A new and powerful Republican shift even further to the right, and with it a resurgence at the polls, was just over the horizon.

trinaire the right-wing resistance to Obama would become.

One month after Obama's inauguration, a business reporter's calculated tirade on the CNBC network against a newly announced financial-aid program for bankrupt homeowners climaxed with a call for a "tea party" protest – and the rant touched off, via social media and with a boost from Fox News Channel, a wildfire of right-wing organizing. In fact, various reports indicate that, early on, the Tea Party phenomenon was, if not wholly contrived, then strongly guided and funded by some longtime major bankrollers of right-wing activities, including Americans for Prosperity, backed by the multibillionaires Charles and David H. Koch, and FreedomWorks, headed by Tom DeLay's erstwhile ally, former House Majority Leader Dick Armey. Congresswoman Michele Bachmann of Minnesota organized what she called a Tea Party caucus in the House and established a political action committee that in time would raise \$2.5 million and aid, among others, the Senate candidacies of Rand Paul in Kentucky and Marco Rubio in Florida.

Predominately white, male and over 40, the Tea Party movement was, and is, wrongly perceived as simply an outburst of old-fashioned anti-government fervor. Surveys of Tea Party adherents have shown that a nebulous swirl of resentments pervades the movement, to some degree generational (with common complaints about entitled young people), and to some degree tinged with racial antipathy (although not usually explicitly racist). There is a general anxiety inside the movement about precisely the kind of "change" that Obama promised during the 2008 campaign, which the Tea Party faithful

take to mean nothing less than eradicating the American way of life. Politicians of almost every stripe are despised: Democrats in general, but also mainstream Republicans, whom the Tea Party rebels deem spineless fakes who have proved incapable of defending decent Americans from parasitic big government. And then there was the first African-American president, who many on the right thought was not an American at all, had forged his birth certificate and was a Muslim.

Over the next four years, a fierce, three-sided struggle involving the White House, the Republican congressional leadership and the aroused Tea Party base sharpened the polarizing pattern of the previous three decades. Less than a month after his inauguration, over nearly unanimous Republican opposition, Obama enacted a large if insufficient economic stimulus package. In 2010, he signed the Dodd-Frank Act, the most sweeping legislation on financial regulation since the reforms of the New Deal era. And in that same year, after a prolonged battle with Congress, Obama signed the Affordable Care Act, the boldest piece of social legislation since LBJ's Great Society.

When the Republicans affixed the label "Obamacare" to the ACA, support for the Tea Party spiked. In the 2010 congressional primaries, Tea Party-backed insurgencies toppled establishment-GOP candidates, and in an electoral surge reminiscent of the Gingrich-led Contract With America campaign, Republicans picked up, along with six seats in the Senate, an astounding 63 seats in the House, regaining the majority they had lost in 2006. "Our top political priority over the next two years," Sen. Mitch McConnell said two days after the election, "should be to deny President Obama a second term in office."

The new Congress brought to the fore the fresh crop of Republican leaders who had begun plotting against Obama on Inauguration Day 2009, including Majority Leader Eric Cantor, Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy and the chairman of the House Budget Committee, Paul Ryan. Having dubbed themselves the Young Guns, they were palpably uncomfortable with the new speaker of the House, John Boehner. A mediocre politician with a gift for longevity, Boehner was the last man standing from the Gingrich revolution. First Gingrich had been beheaded; then Bob Livingston resigned in a phone-sex-tapes scandal; then Dennis Hastert was installed as the puppet of DeLay; then DeLay was undone; then the GOP lost the House partly as the result of a sex scandal involving House pages. (Hastert's history as a sexually predatory high school wrestling coach still remained hidden.) Boehner, the underling, became the face of an embattled and dwindling GOP establishment, challenged by a younger generation of radical rightists.

From the start, the Young Guns made it clear that they would try to force the administration's hand by manufacturing a controversy over the federal debt limit. Dating back to World War I, the limit is an artificial cap, determined by Congress, on the amount that Congress can borrow in order to honor obligations already made. For decades, Congress had raised the cap as a matter of course. By misrepresenting the limit (sometimes called a "debt ceiling") as a virtuous restric-

tion on federal spending, Republicans cast themselves to the party's base as fighting a battle for fiscal righteousness, rather than partisan cynicism. But the threat made to the White House was undisguised blackmail: Unless the administration agreed to gut Obamacare, Congress would send the nation's finances careening over the cliff.

Early in 2011, the emboldened Republican House threatened to shut down the government as Gingrich had done in 1995, and forced a last-minute deal in which Obama received \$79 billion less in discretionary spending than he had wanted. Over the next few months, Boehner and Obama would enter into negotiations for what the president called a "grand bargain" on the budget, only to see talks repeatedly fall apart when the speaker would balk at a compromise, having grown so fearful of a backlash from Tea Party members in the House.

Amid the 2011 debt-ceiling crisis, Obama apparently abandoned any illusions about post-partisanship and instead defended positive government while lambasting theories of trickle-down economics. And Republicans were dumbfounded

when he won re-election by 5 million votes and a landslide in the Electoral College, while Democrats dominated the overall vote total of both the House and Senate elections. As a result of gerrymandering by GOP-controlled state legislatures, the Republicans retained control of the House.

Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee, struggled mightily with his party's inner conflicts. Another scion of the establishment, the son of George Romney, a pro-civil rights governor of Michigan, Romney had been a moderate governor of Massachusetts, and he entered the race for the nomination as the well-funded front-runner. By the time he secured the nomination, Romney had been compelled to adopt extreme positions popular in Tea Party circles but fatal in the general election, including selecting as his running mate Paul Ryan, a proud acolyte of the right-wing cult heroine Ayn Rand.

Neither Boehner nor Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

could break the GOP's absolutists, who repeatedly threatened shutting down the government or forcing a fiscal default if their demands were not met. During the weeks after Obama's re-election, dogmatic hard-liners brought the nation back to the brink of the fiscal cliff. Ten months later, after almost continuous skirmishing with the White House – and with another fiscal crisis looming – House Republicans called for the defunding of Obamacare and forced a two-week government shutdown. Voters blamed congressional Republicans for the latest shutdown fiasco – but the conservative base blamed Boehner, McConnell and the rest of the party leadership for backing down once more.

Persistent right-wing pressure inside the House Republican caucus opened an additional political front with the ginned-up Benghazi investigations. Right-wing commentators, led by Fox News, imputed that the White House and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had lied about the murders of four Americans in Libya. By the end of April 2014, two Senate committees and four Republican-led House committees had investigated the Benghazi attacks and found no evidence of

In 2016, racial minorities, single women, millennials and seculars will form 63 percent of voters. "We have reached an electoral tipping point," says Stanley Greenberg.

wrongdoing by senior officials, including Obama and Clinton. (A fifth House committee would come to the same conclusion.)

Still, Tea Party radicals in the House compelled Speaker Boehner to appoint a select House committee on Benghazi. Boehner named as chair Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, who had won his seat in 2010 after defeating a Republican who had made the fatal mistake of publicly stating that he believed in the scientific reality of climate change. In the end, the resulting Benghazi hearing proved to be a repeat of the Whitewater investigations. In a long-scheduled showdown with 11 hours of testimony before a choleric committee – a grilling unprecedented in the history of American presidential politics – Clinton seemed to dispel the cloud of suspicion around her and expose the entire affair as an overtly partisan witch hunt.

Meanwhile, Speaker Boehner was losing his grip. Over the summer, congressional conservatives, led by Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, delivered their latest threat to shut down the government, this time over defunding Planned Parenthood. In late September, Boehner, weary of the intramural savaging, resigned from the speakership and his House seat, reprising Gingrich's departure more than 15 years earlier. The speakership fell to Rep. Paul Ryan. With his Randian view of the world and past efforts to slash social spending, Ryan is the most committed ideologue to sit in the speaker's chair in living memory, standing well to the right of the Gingrichite holdover Boehner. Yet the conservative media figures playing to the new breed of Republican radicals regard Ryan warily as not nearly conservative enough. And Ryan had to work hard to win endorsement from the far-right Freedom Caucus in the House.

The current contest for the Republican nomination has only accelerated the party's fitful lurch even further toward extremism. After decades of ever-intensifying radicalization, the Republican voting base – of which three-quarters now define themselves as Tea Party supporters, evangelicals or religiously observant – was ill-disposed to accept an establishment figure of any kind, resulting in a bizarre primary season where “anti-politician” candidates like Donald Trump and Ben Carson have dominated in the polls. No matter the identity of the victor, he will be the leader of a party transformed since Nixon's nomination 48 years before the 2016 contest – a party now irrevocably bound by a series of inflamed reactionary impulses expressed not only as hatred for the American government and a desire to paralyze it but also in fear and loathing for the new, modern and diverse American society.

AT ONE LEVEL, HISTORY'S TIDE MAY FINALLY have turned against that reaction. By the eve of 2016, evidence of a profound social and cultural revolution begun decades ago became too strong to ignore. The rise of the Internet, changing patterns in immigration, racial and ethnic diversity, family organization and gender roles, as well as declining religious piety, have created an America unimaginable when Clinton and Gingrich squared off 20 years ago.

According to data reported by the respected Democratic pollster Stanley B. Greenberg, a majority of U.S. households are now headed by unmarried people; non-religious seculars outnumber Protestants; and two-thirds of women are either the breadwinners or co-breadwinners of their households. Racial minorities now constitute nearly 40 percent of the nation's population. According to one Gallup Poll, 60 percent to 70 percent of Americans consider homosexual relations, out-of-wedlock births and divorce as “morally acceptable.”

Even more striking, according to Greenberg, the electorate has changed as well. In 2012, the combined numbers of minor-

ities, single women, millennials and seculars formed 51 percent of the nation's voters. In 2016, Greenberg's analysis shows, these same groups will form 63 percent of the electorate. As each of these groups supports Hillary Clinton for president by margins of two to one, Greenberg writes, “It is fair to say that the United States has reached an electoral tipping point.”

Despite these apparent social and cultural trends, though, the Republicans might well win. They understand the stakes, and their resources are astounding. The Koch brothers' political network alone has vowed to spend \$250 million on the 2016 campaign, out of a two-year political budget reaching toward \$1 billion. Fox News is a powerful force in shaping public perceptions. Over the past 30 years, Republicans have proven masterful at manufacturing pseudo-scandals that, with the aid of a cowed, careerist mainstream press corps, have smeared reputations and distorted public debate. No matter what happens in the national elections, meanwhile, the radicalized Republicans will continue their power grabs in the states, having gained control during Obama's presidency of the majority of governorships and legislatures. This control has already altered national politics through gerrymandering that virtually ensures a GOP stranglehold on the House of Representatives through 2023. It will allow the Republicans to expand their campaigns to restrict voting rights, gut firearm legislation and deprive poor women of reproductive health care; and in Washington, Republicans will invent more select committees to propagandize their political hoaxes.

A Republican victory would bring a comprehensive, regressive offensive unlike any yet seen in modern American politics over the entire gamut of issues from taxes and climate change to immigration and women's rights. More broadly, it would signal a full-scale assault on basic democratic principles, not just on the programs that have guided the nation since the Great Society, the New Deal, the Progressive era, or even the Civil War, but on the living egalitarian idea from which American progress has flowed.

Not since the 1850s has an entrenched minority managed to shift one of the major political parties to such extremes while also holding so much leverage over the nation's politics. Then, it was the Democratic Party that became the vehicle of reaction, as Southern slaveholders brooking no interference with the expansion of slavery effectively rid their party of anyone who would not truckle to their demands. When Congress passed laws not to their liking, the Southerners threatened secession, and when they had so alienated the rest of the country that they lost the White House to Abraham Lincoln in 1860, they made good on their threats to secede, which drove the nation into civil war.

The crisis facing the United States today is not the same as it was then. But there are similarities, and the stakes of the coming election, if not those of 1860, are high enough. Over the past 50 years, the Republican Party has by fits and starts eliminated all traces of moderation and moved further and further to the right, well beyond where Goldwater, let alone Nixon, once stood. By the 2016 campaign for the Republican nomination, that radicalization has intensified to the point where, week by week, leading presidential contenders seem to be trying to outdo one another in the shock value of their right-wing extremism. And the more radical the Republicans have become, the more apparent it is how profound a gulf separates the two political parties. “A Choice, Not an Echo” went the title of a pro-Goldwater tract in the polarizing election of 1964. The 2016 election presents the starkest choice since then, indeed, in living memory, but now with literally everything at stake. The country will, as Lincoln said, become either all one thing or all the other.

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Reviews

"Send my love to your new lover/
Treat her better/
We've got to let go of all of our ghosts."
—ADELE, "Send My Love
(To Your New Lover)"

Welcome to Adele's Brave New World

The pop superstar makes a case for greatness on her most self-assured LP yet



Adele

25 XL/Columbia

★★★★★

BY JON DOLAN

Adele's 2011 blockbuster, *21*, was all about turning pain into power. Four years and 30 million albums sold later, remorse is still her muse. But where *21* was the sound of a woman soldiering through bad romance, *25* finds her queenly and resolute, lamenting the past on songs with titles like "Water Under the Bridge" and "When We Were Young." Even "Hello" is a goodbye. The nostalgic mood is the perfect fit for an artist who reaches back decades for her influences, even as her all-or-nothing urgency feels utterly modern.

Some of pop's biggest names, from Max Martin to Bruno Mars, join familiar faces like Paul Epworth and Ryan Tedder in *25*'s dream team of producers and co-writers. They help create a rich set of songs without getting in the way of the lady in charge. "River Lea," a collaboration with Danger Mouse, is an organ-heavy soul



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Reviews

shouter, and “Water Under the Bridge” builds to gospel-steeped ecstasy. Adele is more somber on “Million Years Ago,” a gorgeous acoustic reverie that suggests Caetano Veloso writing for Dusty Springfield. “I feel like my life is flashing by,” she sings, her voice deepening with regret and sounding decades beyond her years.

The music feels more mature, too, on torchy ballads like “When We Were Young” and “Love in the Dark.” The most powerful moment is “All I Ask,” a silken tempest co-written with Mars, where Adele addresses a lover on what she knows will be their final night, processing the end of an affair in what feels like slow motion. When she sings, “Give me a memory I can use,” it’s like she’s already imagining the heart-rending song she’ll craft from the experience. There’s vulnerability in that moment, but there’s also grace and resilience.

Throughout *25*, there’s a deeper sense of artistic command. In a great, intimate bit before the start of “Send My Love (To Your New Lover),” she issues orders to the guys in the studio: “Just the guitar.” The Martin-helmed song that follows – built on a nimble acoustic figure – is a farewell to an ex who couldn’t deal with Adele’s fire, sung with chill composure.

Whether she’s holding notes with the strength of a suspension bridge or enjoying a rare lighthearted “whooh-hoo!” on “Sweetest Devotion,” her incredible phrasing – the way she can infuse any line with nuance and power – is more proof that she’s among the greatest interpreters of romantic lyrics. “No river is too wide or too deep for me to swim to you,” she sings on the gently lifting “Remedy.” On *25*, no feat of strength comes as a surprise. Let’s just hope the next one is called *28*, and not, say, *30*. Each new chapter of her story is too good to wait for. **A**

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Smiley-smile:
Martin



Coldplay's Bright Pop Pick-Me-Up

Beyoncé, Noel and Gwyneth help
Chris Martin shake out the sads

Coldplay *A Head Full of Dreams* EMI Nashville
★★★★



Coldplay’s last album, 2014’s *Ghost Stories*, was a surprisingly dark and muted set released just months after Chris Martin’s split with Gwyneth Paltrow. A year and a half later, the frown has been turned upside down. *A Head Full of Dreams*, produced by Norwegian hitmakers Stargate, might be Coldplay’s brightest album ever – an eagle’s-wings whoosh of soaring melodies, happy dance beats and Martin at his most wide-eyed. “There are miracles at work,” he sings on the album-opening title anthem, which sounds like U2 and New Order on a joint humanitarian mission.

Coldplay flex their coalition-building strength by bringing together Beyoncé’s backing vocals and Noel Gallagher’s heroic guitar on the gingerly optimistic “Up&Up.” Bey also appears amid chirping birds on the R&B-touched “Hymn for the Weekend.” The LP’s healing mood is made personal when Paltrow herself adds some vocals to the warm farewell, “Everglow,” on which Martin compares his ex to a diamond, a lion and an eagle. He’s hinted that this could be Coldplay’s last album; if so, they’re going out on a sustained note of grace. **JON DOLAN**

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By Peter Travers

Laughs You Can Choke On

Capitalism takes a comic wallop from a cast of A-listers, and the smart money says it's a good investment

The Big Short

Steve Carell, Christian Bale, Ryan Gosling, Brad Pitt

Directed by Adam McKay

★★★★½

IT SOUNDS LIKE A HORROR show: a doomsday epic about the 2008 financial crisis and the Wall Street wolves who got rich off it. Gone were the homes, jobs and savings of average Joes. But wait. As directed and written by Adam McKay – the dude behind *Anchorman* and other giddy hits with Will Ferrell, his partner on the website Funny or Die – *The Big Short* is hunting bigger game. I'd call it a Restoration comedy for right the fuck now, a farce fueled by rage against the machine that relentlessly kills ethics, and a hell of a hilarious time at the movies if you're up for laughs that stick in your throat.

Based on the nonfiction bestseller by Michael Lewis, *The Big Short* is brilliantly constructed by McKay to hit where it hurts. A terrific Christian Bale pulls you right in as Michael Burry, an eccentric neurologist-turned-money-manager who pads around barefoot in his San Jose office, fiddling with his glass eye and banging drums. It's Burry who figures out that those subprime home loans the banks hand out to bad credit risks are a disaster in the making.

Wall Street fat cats dismiss Burry as a crank. But not Jared Vennett (Ryan Gosling), a Deutsche Bank dealmaker who relishes Burry's idea to bet against the banks by shorting home loans that are bound to default. Gosling,



Wall Street wolves: Carell and Gosling

a virtuoso of verbal sleaze, talks directly to the camera, and he's volcanically fierce and funny. It's Vennett who intensifies the big short by partnering with Mark Baum (Steve Carell), a hedge-fund manager who runs FrontPoint, a sub-

sidary of Morgan Stanley. Baum is a hardass. But he knows a good deal when it gets a thumbs-up from his trio of number crunchers (Rafe Spall, Hamish Linklater and Jeremy Strong). Baum is also the only character in the film with a working conscience. Carell

is just tremendous, following his Oscar-nominated turn in *Foxcatcher* with a performance of comic cunning and shocking gravity. Likewise, Brad Pitt finds the disgust in Ben Rickert, a banker who's paying for his sins by helping the environment – that is, until he uses two young money managers (Finn Wittrock and John Magaro) to bite the hand that fed him.

Camera maestro Barry Ackroyd helps McKay keep the plot in a perpetual spin. When it sails over your head – and it will – McKay drops in celeb explainers, including Selena Gomez, Anthony Bourdain and Margot Robbie. Are you more likely to understand CDOs if a naked Robbie explains them in a bubble bath? Probably not. But who's complaining? McKay dares greatly by couching his anger in a slapstick tragedy that makes us wish we could see every character in it behind bars. Does the risk pay off? Bet on it.

A Holiday Crowd-Pleaser

Creed

Michael B. Jordan

Directed by Ryan Coogler

★★★★

Hot damn! We have a winner. *Fruitvale Station* director Ryan Coogler, 29, turbocharges the

Rocky franchise. His focus: Adonis Johnson (a stellar Michael B. Jordan), the bastard son of late champ Apollo Creed (Carl Weathers). The kid needs Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) to



Stallone trains Jordan to box.

train him. Just enough plot for Jordan to strut his stuff, and for a never-better Stallone to play the aging boxer with such a mix of tough and tender that Oscar should give him points. Yo!

BACKSTAGE PASS

SPECIAL OFFERS AND PROMOTIONS

Acting Giants Let It All Rip

Youth

Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel, Jane Fonda

Directed by Paolo Sorrentino

★★★★½



Fonda takes on the perils of aging.

FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELTS for Jane Fonda, who gives a seismic jolt to Paolo Sorrentino's exquisite meditation on art and aging. She plays Brenda Morel, a Hollywood star who visits filmmaker Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel) at a lush Swiss resort. He needs her star power to get his new film financed. Instead, she lowers the boom. "The future is television – so's the present," she tells Mick. "Not your cinema bullshit." It's a juicy role, and a full-force Fonda plays the hell out of it.

Youth is superior cinema, ardent and artful. Sorrentino, an Oscar winner for *The Great Beauty*, fills every frame with ravishing

images that evoke his idol, Fellini. Gloriously shot by Luca Bigazzi and scored by David Lang, the movie engulfs you like a dream.

Keitel, in peak form, seizes the role of a man who thirsts to make one last film "testament." Mick is at the resort with his best friend, Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine), a composer who won't come out of retirement even when the queen dangles a knighthood. Fred's daughter and assistant, Lena (Rachel Weisz), is married to Mick's son (Ed Stoppard), who has just dumped her for a pop star. Her distress is echoed by Jimmy Tree (an outstanding Paul Dano), an actor

who doubts if he'll ever get past the robot role that made him a star.

Sorrentino eases us into these tormented lives, letting us breathe with them as their feelings flower or fade. *Youth* is a feast for actors. Caine and Keitel are wonders to behold. And the sublime Weisz has a rending scene in which she releases repressed anger and gives Daddy both barrels.

Caine, in the best and most moving performance of his later career, reflects the soul of a hypnotic and haunting film that attempts to reconcile youth and age, not set them apart. If that's cinema bullshit, sign me up. **C**

A Personal Vision of Nazi Hell

Son of Saul

Géza Röhrig

Directed by László Nemes

★★★★½



Röhrig (right) grilled by Christian Harting

AS WITH EVERY HOLOCAUST film, *Son of Saul* will stir complaints that cinema is too trivial to encompass such profound evil. But there's nothing trivial about this Hungarian masterpiece from first-time director László Nemes. You don't merely witness horror, you feel it in your bones.

Nemes keeps his camera tightly focused on Saul Auslander (Géza Röhrig), a Jewish prisoner at Auschwitz. Saul temporarily escapes the ovens by serving with the Sonderkommando, Jews coerced to help execute other Jews and dispose of the bodies. We see only what Saul sees,

the more heinous acts blurred in the background, but all the more terrifying for that.

Tension surges when Saul finds a boy who has survived the gas. When the boy dies, Saul makes it his impossible goal to provide

a Jewish burial. Is the boy Saul's own son? Or symbolic of a greater loss?

All you need to know is in the haunted eyes of Röhrig, whose raw and riveting performance deserves superlatives. Nemes is tackling a subject of enormous complexity. The result is, quite simply, a great film. **C**

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'STAR WARS'

[Cont. from 51] a blondish-brown; behind the tinted lenses of her stylish glasses, her brown eyes are bright, perpetually amused. Her three-year-old French bulldog, Gary, is by her side, as he was on the *Star Wars* set: He was cool with Chewbacca, but traumatized by the sight of a big-eyed creature played by Simon Pegg. "I don't think J.J. was wild about Gary," Fisher says. "He said, 'Explain the dog thing to me.'"

One of the most appealing aspects of the new movie is the idea of peeking back in on Han and Leia's romance. How close Ford and Fisher got in real life is a mystery. Fisher has hinted at possibilities that she may never fully disclose, even in her next book: Brilliantly titled *The Princess Diarist*, it's based on journals Fisher recently discovered from the first film. When Ford found out about it, he joked about needing a lawyer.

The original trio went through a Beatles-like burst of

fame together. But Ford plays down their relationships: "We had separate lives in different places, separate paths. It wasn't, like, one for all and all for one." That said, when Ford came onstage at Comic-Con in July, he kissed Fisher on the lips. "They acted like it was a porn shot," she says archly. "It was too fast to be surprised. I was surprised at all the pictures – you know...elder porn!"

Oh, come on....

"I mean, you don't see a lot of movies where they celebrate older people making out. Necking!" She has always had chemistry with Ford, who is 15 years older. "Because he makes me nervous and I overcome it. Imagine being 19 and running into that." She pauses. "He deserves a good word. Formidable? I made people a little nervous with my, you know, verbal liquidity, so that kept me safe, but you're not safe with him. He can get around any of that. And if he's impressed by it, you don't see it."

On the new movie, Fisher was on edge at first. "I was very

nervous, had a lot of memory problems – just horrific – and then it got better," she says. "Think about it, what it would be to make three of these movies a million years ago, and now let's do it again, only you're 40 years older and there's a lot to live up to – or down. And people want it to be the same but better! So there's pressure on it. But then you get over yourself and say, 'By the way, it's about the younger people doing it.'"

She is dispassionate in assessing her old performances, and is as amused as anyone by the British accent she used in some early scenes. "I'd just gone to drama school – *in England!*" she says. "The biggest thing where I'm bad is one of the first scenes I shot, which was 'Governor Tarkin, I thought I recognized your foul stench when I was brought on board!'" To prove the awkwardness of the line, she makes me recite it to her. (This is, I realize later, one of the greatest moments of my life.)

Fisher gives a long, entertaining tour of her property on

my way out, ending in one of her guest house's themed rooms. "This is the space room," she says. Of course, it is filled with *Star Wars* memorabilia, including a campy painted poster of the original characters playing in a rock band. Leia is the lead singer. "You could use it and put the new kids in," she says, breaking into an improvised song: "There are new kids in spaaaaace."

Also in the room is a rejected original poster for the first film, with the slogan "How many times have you looked up and wondered what was going on," over a field of stars. I read it out loud, and Fisher answers the question. "Every day!"

The day before, maybe five minutes after I left Hamill's house, a Toyota pulled up next to me at a stoplight. In the passenger seat was a young woman in full Princess Leia garb, apparently headed to a Halloween party. It was as if the Force was sending some inscrutable message, and Fisher isn't surprised. "No," she says. "They're everywhere."



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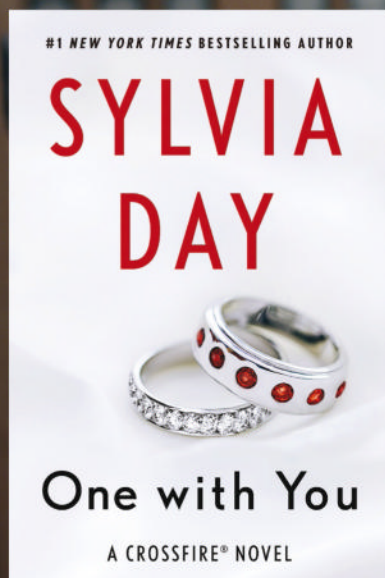


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RS 246 AUGUST 25TH, 1977

'Star Wars' Blasts Off

Star Wars had been in theaters for only eight weeks when the cast appeared on the cover of *ROLLING STONE*, but the film had already grossed \$54 million and become a global phenomenon. Nobody seemed more shocked than director George Lucas, who had been deluged by budget squabbles and technical hang-ups while shooting in the Tunisian desert. "I realized why directors are such horrible people," he said. "You want things to be right, and people will just not listen to you and there is no time to be nice to people." Lucas had already decided to hand future *Star Wars* films over to other directors (which he did on the franchise's next two installments). "I figured the merchandising along with the sequels would give me enough income over a period of time so that I could retire from professional filmmaking and go into making my own kind of movies," he said, "my own sort of abstract, weird, experimental stuff."

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In the Issue: RS 246

Fleetwood Mac Take New York

Fleetwood Mac

Madison Square Garden, June 29th, 1977



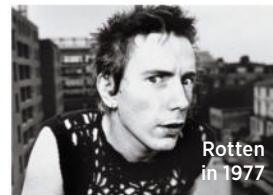
Stevie Nicks had a rough night on this stop on the *Rumours* tour – an RS review noted she suffered from vocal strain and “lurched” around the stage as roadies followed to prevent a fall. But the show was still a triumph, thanks especially to Lindsey Buckingham’s guitar heroics.

The Fire Inside Johnny Rotten

Sex Pistols

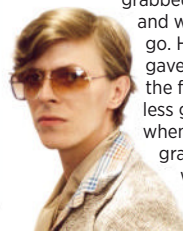
“God Save the Queen” *Virgin*

The Pistols’ second single offered ample evidence they were more than just mindless hype. “Their violent behavior has tended to obscure the fact that they have something to say,” wrote Charles Young in his review. “The song is a perfect union of angry lyrics and music.” Two months later they’d appear on the cover, just before they broke up.



David Bowie Falls to Earth

The Random Notes section covered Bowie’s appearance at the French premiere of his film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*: “Escorting model Sydne Rome, Bowie was almost choked when a fan grabbed his scarf and wouldn’t let go. He graciously gave the scarf to the fan. He was less gracious later when another fan grabbed for his wallet.”



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